NEW

NICK CARTER WEEKLY

Issued Weekly. By subscription $2.50 per year. Entered as Second-class Matter at the N. Y. Post Office, by STREET & SMITH, *79-89 Seventh Ave., N. Y.*

No. 551 NEW YORK, JULY 20, 1907. **Price, Five Cents**

RALPH BOLTON'S DOUBLE PLOT

OR,

NICK CARTER'S THREE ASSISTANTS AT WORK

BY THE AUTHOR OF "NICK CARTER"

"Hello, Mike," said Nick, "I am sorry to interrupt your little journey, but there are some people inside the station here who want to see you. If you make a move to escape I will shoot you."

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RALPH BOLTON'S DOUBLE PLOT;

OR,

Nick Carter's Three Assistants at Work.

Edited by CHICKERING CARTER.

CHAPTER. I.

THE MYSTERY OF AN EAST SIDE FLAT.

Nick Carter, accompanied by his second assistant, Patsy, was hurrying through East Fourteenth Street at half-past one o'clock in the morning. It had been a night of riot among the elements. The wind was howling around them like a live thing—blowing so fiercely that there were times when even these two strong men found it difficult to catch their breath in the face of its impelling force.

The air was thick with rain, too. It was driven upon them in sheets—almost in chunks, it would seem, so that an umbrella, even if it could have been carried in the teeth of that storm, would have been of no utility in keeping them dry.

They were at a point between First and Second Avenues, when a loud and piercing scream, as if of combined terror and agony, brought them both to a sudden halt.

It had been borne to them from a window across the street, evidently, but from which one of the myriads of windows that were over there it was impossible to tell.

They were both conscious that they had heard the sound of a window being thrown up, then the wild scream, and then again the sound of the window as it was dashed down into place again.

They both stopped and eagerly scanned the fronts of the houses across the street; but in that driving rain and the hurtling wind it was impossible to see anything at all with clearness.

There were no lights in any of the windows near the location from which they both thought the sound had proceeded; there was nothing to guide them to the source of that sound.

"We might go into a dozen of those houses over there without hitting upon the right one, chief," grumbled Patsy. "But that was a genuine appeal for help, all right."

"Yes," assented the detective. "And we must not ignore it. I think we had better wait and watch for a few moments."

He drew his assistant with him and together they stepped into the doorway of one of the low-stooped houses near them; and there, partially sheltered from the storm, they waited for something to guide them.

As it happened they had not long to wait—and, strangely enough, they both happened to have their

eyes fixed upon the same window across the street, when the thing occurred that was to direct them.

A light suddenly appeared in one of the windows; not a bright light, but just such a glow as would be shown if a door which connected with another room that was lighted, had been thrown open. In other words, it was apparent to both the detectives that some person had rushed into that front room from a rear one, leaving the door open between the apartments.

The next instant there was a sound of crashing glass, and a common chair came smashing through the window, carrying the entire lower sash with it.

And then they could see the form of a woman, or a girl, hurl herself toward the aperture, and even in that brief glance that was afforded them there was no doubt in either of their minds that it was her intention to hurl herself out of it to the street below.

But other forms were pursuing her.

She had barely reached the window ere she was seized and pulled back again, and once more that awful scream rang out upon the storm-laden air.

The detectives could see that there were three among those who pursued the girl, who was trying to escape, or who preferred to dash herself to death upon the pavement three stories below, to remaining where she was—there were three—two men and another woman.

And then, when still another scream began its shrill call of terror and agony, it was hushed almost before it began, the woman was dragged back again out of sight, and the window was dark once more.

"Three flights up," said Nick as he started forward. "Come, Patsy. We will have to interfere in that proceeding. It looks to me as if murder was being done over there."

He said most of this while he was running forward across the street, with Patsy beside him; and it required only a moment for them to reach the door of the house they desired to enter.

The outer-door of the vestibule was not locked; the inner-door gave way almost instantly before the fierce pressure of Nick Carter's knee against it, and both detectives dashed through the narrow hall toward the stairway, which was located well toward the rear of the building.

The stairway is what is known as a square-spiral, and it ascended through a well, so to speak. Eight steps up, turn and seven more, brought one to the second floor, for instance—and so on; and there was a front and rear apartment on each floor.

But it was the front apartment on the third floor that the detectives were seeking, nor did it take them long to reach it—and here Nick Carter did not stand upon ceremony; he did not stop to ring a bell and wait for the door to open, but he applied the same methods to this door he had used on the one below, with the result that it crashed open before them almost instantly.

They had expected to find a lighted room, but it was only black-darkness that greeted them—black-darkness and utter silence.

But they were both provided with pocket-electrics, and exceedingly powerful ones at that, and as if with one impulse they produced them and flashed brilliant gleams into the room in front of them.

They saw then that they were looking into what was the dining-room of the flat; a small, stuffy room with a square-table in the center of it, which had not been touched since the last meal was eaten there.

Two of the chairs which belonged at the table were overturned on the floor, and at one of the places a cup of coffee had been spilled upon the cloth. Only three places had been arranged at the table, and the plates at each place were littered with cigar and cigarette-ashes and butts.

Nick Carter saw all this at a glance. Then he directed Patsy to light the gas—and while the assistant was doing that, he himself stepped quickly across the room to another door and threw it open.

Again he found himself peering into a room that was black-dark save for the light that now gleamed through from the gas-jet which Patsy had lighted; and even by that light he saw that this was the room of the tragedy.

As he flashed his electric-light upon the scene, it focused directly upon the face of a woman—or a girl, rather—who was stretched upon her back on the floor between the table, which was in the middle of the room, and a couch, which stood against the wall at the left side of it.

She was apparently dead; there was a terrible bruise slantingly across her forehead, just above her right temple—a bruise that had cut through the skin and had drawn blood—and beside her on the floor was a short and ugly-looking black-jack, with which the wound had been inflicted.

But whoever had committed the deed had already escaped; that was evident, for Nick started forward at once, stepped over the body of the girl and peered into the one remaining room of the flat—the room where the chair had been thrown through the window by the girl in her desperate effort to escape.

There was nothing in that front-room at all to attract the attention of the detective. It was just an ordinary front-parlor of a very ordinary city flat. It contained very little furniture, and the room itself had evidently been used almost not at all.

"They got away mighty sudden, Patsy," the detective remarked as he turned back again into the middle-room. "Must have gone by the roof, I reckon; or else——"

"What, chief?"

"Or else they haven't left the building at all."

"They surely didn't go out by the front way. We were too quick for that."

"I'm inclined to think, lad, that they are now somewhere inside the building—that they have gone into another flat above or below this one—probably above it."

"Do you think I had better go down to the front-door and stand guard there, chief?"

"No. There is an all-night drug-store on the corner. Go there and call up the police-station. Ask the sergeant to send me two men as soon as he can—men in uniform, I want. Then return here. Before you go, Patsy, run to the top of the house and see if there is an easy way out to the roof. It is only two more flights."

The detective was already bending over the body of the young woman, and now as Patsy left the room to carry out his orders, he lifted the inanimate form to the couch and made her as comfortable as he could there.

Then he got down upon his knees beside her and pressed his ear firmly against her heart.

"She is not dead, as yet," he murmured, when he could hear a faint fluttering there. "Poor girl."

And now for the first time he gave some attention to her face. He was in the act of examining the wound, when he started back with a quick exclamation of surprise, and then bending closer to her again, he half-exclaimed:

"Hermia Bolton!" And then a moment later he said again: "I wonder if it is Hermia Bolton."

Patsy entered at that instant to report that there was a way to the roof that was dead easy, but that from all appearance, nobody had made use of it lately.

"All right," said Nick half-absently. "Get out there to the telephone as soon as you can, but rouse up a doctor on your way there, or on your way back, and bring him here with you. I think you will find two or three doctor's signs between here and the corner. Get a doctor here as quickly as you can."

The detective had noticed that there was a bottle half-filled with brandy on the table in the dining-room, and now he procured it hastily. Then, having smelled of it to make sure that it was all right, he forced a few drops between the young woman's lips.

Perceiving, however, that she manifested no signs of coming round, and realizing that he could accomplish nothing until the doctor arrived, he drew back again and once more studied the beautiful features of the insensible girl.

"It looks like her, and yet I hardly think it is she," he mused. "There is the same flaxen, Swedish hair, and the features are the same; but somehow, even in her unconsciousness, this girl looks younger than Hermia Bolton.

"I wonder where Hermia Bolton is now?" he mused on, still with his eyes fixed upon that face, and therefore with his back toward the door. For once in his life he was forgetful of his usual caution. "I wonder," he began again; but he got no further than that, for his alert ears detected a faint sound behind him.

Instantly he wheeled in his tracks to face whoever might have made that sound.

But he only succeeded in turning half-around, for as he wheeled, something that was heavy and hard descended through the air—another black-jack, in fact—and it caught him in almost precisely the same spot where the young woman had been hit.

It was a terrible blow, delivered by a powerful arm, and Nick Carter sank to his knees beneath it; and then as a second blow fell upon him, he rolled over upon the floor, as nearly dead as was the young woman on the couch, whom he had so vainly sought to rescue.

CHAPTER II.

ONE SMALL SPLASH OF BLOOD.

When Patsy returned to the flat, twenty minutes after he left Nick Carter there—when he returned, accompanied by the doctor, whom he had roused out of his sleep, he paused in amazement on the landing just outside the door; and well he might, for the place was as dark as a pocket.

"Wait a moment, doctor," he said quickly; "something has happened here since I started to go after you. Wait where you are just a moment."

Then he flashed his own pocket-light, found the door which Nick had broken open, but which was now closed, although not fastened—and he pushed it open and entered the dining-room, as he and Nick had done together upon their arrival there.

The room looked exactly as it did when they first discovered it, save that there should now have been two gas-jets blazing their light around it.

Realizing that something had happened, the young assistant bounded across the room to the other door which communicated with the middle-room, where they found the body of the girl, and threw it open.

Here again all was darkness—but here was even a greater surprise, for with the flashing of his light around the room, Patsy saw at once that not only was Nick Carter himself missing, but that the body of the girl had been spirited away also.

He lost no time in lighting the gas and exploring the place; that is, he ran almost frantically from one room to another in search of his chief—in search of some evidence of what had become of him.

But there wasn't a sign anywhere to tell him anything.

The body of the girl had disappeared and Nick Carter had disappeared with it, as utterly as if both had been dematerialized during his absence.

In the meantime the doctor had followed Patsy into the rooms.

"Well," he exclaimed impatiently at last, "where is my patient?"

"Gone," replied Patsy, scarcely knowing what he said.

"Gone! Is this some hoax you have been playing on me, sir?"

"No, indeed! Believe me. The patient was here. Mr. Carter had lifted her upon that couch there and was——"

"Who had done that?"

"My chief. Nick Carter."

"Was it Nick Carter who was here? And are you one of his assistants?"

"Yes."

"Now, tell me about it, please. There was a young woman here who was hurt?"

"Yes. She had been hit over the head with a black-jack. We thought she was dead at first. Even now, I think her skull was fractured. We found her here; the chief sent me for you. He was here, kneeling beside that couch when I left him, and now—both are gone. I cannot understand it."

"I can," said the doctor. "You would, too, if you were not just a little bit rattled."

"What do you mean, doctor?"

"You say that Nick Carter was on his knees beside that couch, where the girl was? Well, it is plain enough to me that while he was there, the same people who tried to murder the girl, crept upon him from behind and smashed him over the head with another black-jack before he could defend himself. I'm not a detective, but that is the way I would figure that out."

"You are right. You must be right. But what have they done with two bodies instead of one?"

"I suppose for some reason they wanted the body of the girl, and I suppose also that Nick Carter was not killed, so they thought they would take him with them."

Patsy started for the door, almost on a run; but he stopped when he was half-way there.

"I will wait," he said.

"Wait for what?" asked the doctor.

"I have telephoned to the station for two officers. They will be here in a few minutes. When they come I propose to search this house from top to bottom."

The doctor smiled grimly.

"I am very much afraid that it will do you no good," he said. "If you had searched the house before you went out, well and good; but now—don't you see that the people who were here have had ample time to make their escape through the front door while you were telephoning to the police-station and searching for me?"

Patsy was beginning now, gradually to recover his wits, which had been about knocked out of him by the disappearance of his chief.

"Doctor," he said suddenly, "your office is only a few doors from here. Possibly you may know something about the people who live in this house."

"I know only in a general way. There are five floors here and there are two flats on each floor. That makes ten families in the house. I think they are about the same sort of people that you find in moderately cheap flats all over the city; and you know, in any place of this kind, people are apt to creep in unawares, who are not desirable."

"Yes. I know that."

"There are two families here upon whom I attend regularly. One of them is directly above this one where we are now; the other is in the rear of the first floor. Concerning the remaining tenants, I know nothing at all."

"All the same," said Patsy, "whether the people who had the row in the flat and who struck that girl down—whether they have by now left the building or not, it is certain that they found temporary refuge in one of the other flats for a time."

"Why is it certain, may I ask?"

"Because they could not have escaped us in any other way. You see, we came in at the front-door almost instantly after the appearance of the girl at the window. They had no time to escape from the building."

"How about the door to the roof?"

"I went to the top of the house and had a look at it before I started out after you. It was bolted on the inside."

"Then why didn't you begin a search of the house at once. There was proof almost positive that the people you wanted were in the house. It seems to me that you lost a splendid opportunity."

"I suppose the chief thought that the life of the girl was of more importance than the capture of the people who had injured her. But look here, doctor!"

"Well?"

"Nick and that girl must be somewhere inside of this house yet; don't you see that?"

"I confess that I do not see it, young man."

"They couldn't get Nick Carter away from here, nohow, unless he was unconscious, and we know that the girl *was* unconscious. The chief is no feather-weight, and with two heavy bodies to carry, how were they going to get them away from here during the short time that I was absent?"

"You'll have to ask me an easier one than that, sir. I can only say that in the first place you have no idea how many there were or are in that party of assailants; you don't know whether they had a carriage or two waiting somewhere within call, or not."

"Well, there is one thing that I *do* know."

"What is that?"

"That as soon as those policemen get here I am going to search every flat in this house, from one end to the other."

"I don't think that is at all a bad idea. I'll help you; and when we visit the two flats where I am known, I can make it easier for you. I think I hear the officers coming now."

The doctor was right. The heavy tread up the stairs told of the arrival of the officers, and Patsy was not sorry when he saw that there were four instead of two. The sergeant had sent three from the station-house, and these had picked up the regular man on the beat, who accompanied them.

In as few words as possible Patsy described all that had happened.

"Now," he said, "I want one of you to stand guard over the door that leads to the roof, and another at the front door. I will ask the remaining two to go through the house with me while we are conducting the search."

"What I can't understand," said one of the officers, "is how it happens that they caught Nick Carter napping long enough to swipe him over the nut."

"Nor I," replied Patsy. "Something had distracted his attention."

"Nor can I understand why they wanted to cart him away after they had knocked him out," remarked another of the policemen.

"I think," remarked the doctor quietly, "that that is the ominous part of it."

"How so?"

"It would suggest to me one of two things."

"What are they?"

"It would suggest either that Nick Carter is not badly hurt and they wished to keep him prisoner, or to take him away to murder him at their leisure—or that he is already dead, and that the woman is so badly hurt that she cannot live, and they sought to remove the evidences of their crimes."

"But how did they get them away out of this house? How could they get them away?" insisted Patsy.

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"You just now expressed it as your belief that they were still in the house," he said.

"True. Let's go ahead with that search. We will begin at the top, I think, and search our way down to the ground floor."

"Has it occurred to you," asked the doctor mildly, "that there may be some people in the house who will object—and very naturally, too—to having their apartment searched at this hour of the night? It is now past two o'clock."

"I don't think we will have any difficulty," replied Patsy. "If anyone does object I will tell them that they can let us make the search quietly, or I will place an officer on guard at the door of the apartment until I can procure a warrant. They won't object then."

Patsy, accompanied by the doctor and two of the policemen, began at the top floor rear; and here they had to ring and pound upon the panels of the door for some time before they succeeded in rousing the occupant.

But at last a man appeared, arrayed in a night-shirt, with bleary eyes and a breath like a distillery, unkempt, unshaven, and altogether repulsive in his appearance.

The instant he opened the door he began to curse them for disturbing him; and it was not until several minutes had passed before Patsy succeeded in making him understand what was wanted.

"All right," he said then. "Search away if you want to. I don't care. There ain't nobody here, and there ain't been nobody here at all to-night. I live here all by my little lonesome, since my wife left me. Search, for all I care. You won't find nothin' but me."

Patsy motioned to the doctor and one of the policemen to follow him, and passed inside the flat, which consisted of four small rooms arranged around a little hallway in the center.

At the rear of the house were two rooms, one being evidently a dining-room and the other a parlor with an alcove bedroom off from it, and Patsy made his way directly to these rooms, lighting the gas in them the moment he entered.

A glance told him that nobody was there; and the doctor and the policeman had already examined the other two rooms; and the man who lived there, with a leer in his eyes, said:

"Well, you see, don't you? There ain't nobody here, is there?"

Patsy did not reply.

He was on the point of turning away and leaving the flat, when among the pillows on the couch he saw a shining object which attracted his attention; and then, as he stepped toward it, he made another discovery.

There was a splash—a daub of fresh blood plainly to be seen upon one of the sofa-pillows.

CHAPTER III.

THE MAN IN THE TOP FLOOR REAR.

The occupant of the flat had turned away from Patsy for the moment, to respond to something that the doctor had said, and therefore did not see Patsy's sudden start forward, nor did he notice that the young detective picked up the shining object which had first attracted his attention, and dropped it into one of his pockets.

That shining object was nothing more or less than a jewel-studded comb, such as women sometimes wear in their hair, and Patsy remembered to have seen that very comb in the hair of the young woman whom he and Nick had found insensible two stories below where he was now.

At the same instant that he picked up the comb, he touched the blood spot with his finger and discovered that it was still moist.

It was only a very small spot, not larger than a silver quarter, but Patsy remembered that the wound on the young woman's head had bled some, and now he had no doubt at all but that she had been deposited upon this sofa here in front of him since she was taken from that other flat where she was injured.

With remarkable forethought he said nothing of his discovery.

It occurred to him instantly that even if he should charge this man who lived in the flat with criminal knowledge of what had happened, he had no means of proving that his charge was true. The man would easily find many ways of explaining the presence of the comb and of the blood spot—and by charging him now with guilty knowledge, he would only be putting the fellow on his guard.

On the other hand, if he could leave him in fancied security—if he could make the man feel that no suspicion attached to him, it was more than likely that he would sooner or later lead Patsy directly to the place where Nick and the girl had been taken.

It must not be thought that Patsy intended to delay too long. He did not.

They left the flat presently and rang at the one in front, which they were permitted to search without much remonstrance; then they descended to the fourth floor.

Here, in the front flat, lived one of the families which the doctor attended, and while they were there Patsy took occasion to question the woman, who, inasmuch as the doctor was present and explained the circumstances to her, was perfectly willing to talk.

"I want to know what you can tell me about the people who live directly under you?" he asked her.

"I can't tell you anything at all about them, sir, save that I think they are a bad lot," she replied. "I have never seen any of them to know them," she went on, "but I have heard them often enough. I was saying to my husband only yesterday that I should complain to the agent about them, and if they weren't forced to move away, we would go."

"What was the matter with them?" asked Patsy. "What did they do?"

"They make night hideous with their laughing and talking and singing."

"Nothing worse than that?"

"Isn't that bad enough, sir?"

"Tell me if you heard any noises down there to-night."

"Sure I did. I hear them every night."

"Not the same noises that you heard to-night, do you?"

"Yes. The same."

"Wasn't it the sound of a woman screaming that you heard to-night?"

"It was; and sure I've heard it every night for a week past. The screaming has always been followed by laughter, otherwise I should have thought that somebody was getting hurt, and would have called the police. My husband works nights, and I am alone, save for the baby; if it hadn't been for that I would have gone down myself long ago, to find out what was the matter."

"Did you tell your husband about it?"

"Yes. And he went down there only yesterday. But they didn't answer the bell. If there was anybody at home they wouldn't admit it."

"You never have seen any of the people who live there?"

"Never, sir."

"Judging from the voices you have heard, how many should you suppose lived there?"

"Sometimes it would seem as if there were a dozen there, sir; and again as if there were only two or three or maybe four."

They searched on after that and there was nothing more of any account said until they came to the flat that was directly under the one where Nick had disappeared; and here they found that the occupants had been disturbed a few times by the noises over their heads, but had paid little or no attention to them.

And so, one by one, every flat in the house was examined from one end to the other, and, of course, with no result.

Patsy was of course satisfied that the solution of the mystery was in the rear flat on the top floor, but nevertheless he considered it his duty to search all of them with thoroughness, and this he did.

During all the time the doctor took an absorbing interest in the affair. He followed Patsy closely, and sometimes put in questions of his own; and Patsy felt attracted to the man whom he had never seen until that night, who seemed to take such an interest in him and in the detective for whom they were searching.

When the search was finished Patsy told the policemen that they could return to the station-house; that they could report all that had taken place and say for him that he would call around later with an additional report. Then he turned to the doctor.

"I did not think to read your name on the sign in front of the house," he said. "Or rather, I did not take the time to do so. I saw merely that a doctor lived there, and the name made no difference to me."

"I am Doctor Treat," replied the physician. "I am a nephew of the Doctor Stag, who is one of Nick Carter's old friends."

"Is that so? Good! I know Doctor Stag very well indeed. He is in Europe just now. Well, doctor, you have taken more than a friendly interest in this affair. Tell me just what your opinion of it is."

The doctor shook his head.

"I am almost afraid to do that," he said.

"Why?"

"Because it looks to me as if the worst had happened."

"The worst! What do you mean by the worst?"

"I mean that it looks to me as if the blow that was dealt Nick Carter killed him."

"Nonsense! I don't believe that for a minute. If they had killed him they wouldn't have taken the trouble to carry him away with them. And if they had intended to kill him, they would have finished the job then and there, and left his body for us to find."

"It seems to me that they would have carried the body away in order to conceal the best evidence of their crime."

"Nonsense again, my dear doctor! I have had a great deal of experience with criminals, and they don't do that sort of thing; at least not in just the manner you describe. Besides, the girl wasn't dead! We know that."

"She wasn't dead when you *saw her last;* no."

"Do you mean by that, that they may have finished her since that time?"

"Yes."

"My dear sir, they have given us plenty of proof that they carried her away because she *was* alive."

"How do you make that out?"

"Very simply. Take your mind back to the moment when the chief and I were attracted to this house."

"Well?"

"Three people followed that girl to the window when she tried to leap out of it. Two of the three pulled her back again and dragged her toward that middle-room. We could see that much."

"Well?"

"There had been a window smashed and there had been other noises, and so probably one of those three went into the hall to see if anybody was coming to investigate. In doing that they must have heard Nick force the door to the lower hall. You see, that alarmed them. They doubtless thought that the police were coming."

"Yes."

"Well, either the girl had already been hit with the black-jack, or she was struck in anger at that moment. Be that as it may, when she was struck down, they supposed that she had been killed. That is the point, doctor."

"I don't see the point, yet."

"Supposing her to be dead, they left her where she had fallen, for us to find, or to be discovered by whoever might appear. Being dead, they had no more use for her, and they never thought of removing her body then to conceal any crime."

"I see now what you are getting at."

"I think that after I went away the chief must have been working over the girl, trying to bring her around even before you got here. I think that he was so absorbed by what he was doing that one of the persons who had been in this flat before, was able to steal up behind him and hit him with something that knocked him senseless—and I think that it was discovered then that the girl was alive."

"I can understand," said the doctor, "why they would take the girl away with them, finding that she still lived; but what I cannot understand is why they should take Nick Carter away with them, dead or alive?"

"That's what gets me, too," admitted Patsy.

The reader will understand that after the search of the house was completed, Patsy and the doctor had returned together to the flat on the third floor, where so much had taken place; and then had entered it and closed the door behind them.

This conversation that has just been given took place in the dining-room; that is, in the first room that was entered from the hall; but now, as he made the last remark, Patsy stepped into the adjoining room, first extinguishing the gas in the dining-room.

Then he closed the door between the two rooms and in a low tone he said:

"Doctor, do you mind sitting here in the dark with me for a little while?"

"Not at all. But why?"

"I am under the impression that we will have a call of some sort, before daylight, or about that time."

"A call! Do you think that any of those people will be fools enough to return here after all that has happened?"

"I think that one of them—or at least a confederate of theirs, is still in the house. I have a notion that when he thinks the house is all quiet he will come down here again to look around him. Perhaps to secure something that was left behind. For there are a lot of things here that were left behind, you know."

"Yes. I have been wondering why you did not search through them."

"Because I thought it would be better to wait until daylight to do so."

"But what makes you think there is a confederate inside the house now?"

"I don't think it; I know it."

"Who is he, then?"

"That scoundrel on the top floor, in the rear, who pretended to be drunk, but who was not. The girl was carried from this room to his dining-room and laid upon the couch. I found one of the back combs from her hair there, and also on one of the pillows there was a spot of fresh blood from the wound on her head. Don't you see, doctor, that they put her down there while they carried Nick to the roof, and then they went back to get her? And don't you see that after all had made their escape by way of the roof, the man we saw stepped out and bolted the door after them, so it could not appear

that they had gone that way? Afterward he pretended to be sleeping! If he does not come here to see us before daylight, we will go to call upon him again."

CHAPTER IV.

HOW TO MAKE A SCOUNDREL TALK.

It was about three o'clock in the morning when Patsy put out the lights and he and the doctor seated themselves to wait in silence the coming of the man from the top floor, if indeed the man had any idea of coming there at all.

But Patsy had argued to himself that those who had been compelled to leave the flat so hastily, must perforce have left many things behind them which they would have taken with them had there been time and opportunity, and he believed that this man, whom he now knew to be a confederate, would visit the flat as soon as he felt assured that he could do so safely.

Nevertheless an hour passed in absolute silence, and without any sign that any one was coming.

At last the doctor stirred uneasily; then he bent forward and whispered to Patsy:

"Do you really think there is any use in this waiting here? It looks to me as if it were a waste of valuable time."

"Hush!" replied Patsy. "Don't even whisper. If the man is coming at all, it is about time now for him to put in an appearance."

Five, ten, fifteen minutes more passed, and then they both heard the sharp click of the latch of the outer door in the adjoining room.

Patsy reached out one hand and seized the doctor by the arm to warn him, and then they both drew farther back into their respective places of concealment, for Patsy had arranged before he turned off the lights so that they would be partly concealed from view by another person who might enter and light the gas.

After that first sharp click all was still again for so long a time that the young detective began to think it had been a false alarm—and then he heard the slight touch of a hand against the knob of the door between the rooms; the door between the dining-room and the middle-room where he and the doctor were waiting.

Presently the knob turned softly and slowly; then the door opened quite as slowly.

It creaked just a little bit, and although Patsy could not see a thing, he knew that the door was steadily opening.

Then he was conscious that some person had stepped inside the room and was as softly closing the door again, for it was a solid door, through which light would not penetrate.

Patsy heard the latch as it clicked into place, announcing that the door was closed; and then quite plainly he heard the person who shut it breathe a sigh of relief; and the next moment that person drew a match along his trouser-leg and raised the flame of it to the gas-fixture over the table.

By the light of the match Patsy saw at once that it was the man from the top floor—the one who had pretended to be roused from a drunken slumber.

He turned on the gas at one of the jets and lighted it; but instantly he turned it down again and stood waiting for several moments, perfectly motionless, while he listened intently for any disturbing sound.

But none came to him. There were no sounds save those made by the storm outside, and even those scarcely penetrated so far.

The doctor had withdrawn himself partly behind a bookcase, and stood so that even if the man had turned toward him, he would not have seen him.

Not so with Patsy.

He stood in full view, for he had already edged his way toward the door, in order to cut off the escape of the intruder, if he should discover that he was observed.

But the man did not turn that way at all—at least not then.

He stood listening and watching and waiting for a considerable time; and then he reached upward to the gas-bracket again and slowly turned up the light.

Then he stood and rubbed his hands together, exactly as if he were greatly pleased with something; and then with quick strides he crossed the room toward the mantel that was over the couch, and, reaching out his talon-like fingers, he seized upon a vase that was there and turned it bottom upward upon the couch.

To Patsy's amazement a double handful of rings and other jeweled ornaments rolled out upon the couch, and these the fellow was about to seize upon when the interruption came.

"Hands up!" ordered Patsy sternly, "and do it quick, too!"

The fellow wheeled like lightning, and instead of obeying the order that had been given him, he uttered a scream of rage and leaped like a tiger-cat straight at Patsy's throat.

But Patsy met him half-way; although he held a revolver in his hand he had no intention of using it, and as the man sprang toward him he led out with his left and caught him fairly on the nose. The result was that the fellow went down as if he had been hit with a club, and blood spurted from his nose where Patsy's fist had struck it.

Instantly Patsy followed up his advantage.

He leaped upon the fallen man before he had a chance to rise or draw a weapon, and with a dexterity which is attained only by practise, he snapped handcuffs upon his wrists.

Then with no gentle hand he jerked him to his feet and backed him into a corner where he quickly relieved him of two pistols and a murderous-looking knife with which he was armed.

"I guess that will be about all for you for the present," he said grimly. "You have kept us waiting a long time, my man; but I knew you'd arrive after a while. Don't you try to come out of that corner unless you want another tap on the end of your nose. Now, who are you?"

"Find out!" was the cool rejoinder; for all at once the fellow seemed to have regained his nerve, and outwardly at least, he was as cool as they were.

"Oh, I'll find out all right before I am done with you," said Patsy. "Doctor Treat, will you do me a favor?"

"Certainly. What is it?"

"While I keep guard over this man, so that he won't make any breaks, will you bring that armchair from the dining-table in the other room and put it here in front of our friend?"

The chair was brought, while the prisoner regarded the proceeding wonderingly.

"Now, doctor, we shall need some cord—quite a little of it. If you will go into the front-room and light the gas in there, you will find that there are a few pictures on the walls. If you will pull down the pictures they will supply the cords. They are wire cords, but they will be all the stronger for that."

The doctor was puzzled also, but he understood plainly enough that Patsy had some well defined plan in his head to make the captive talk, and he asked no questions. Presently he returned with an amount of picture-wire.

"What am I to do now?" he asked of Patsy.

"Seat that fellow in the chair—if he resists cuff him, and if he keeps on resisting I will tap him on the nose again—seat him in the chair. That's the idea. Now draw one of the wires tightly around the chair and across his chest; twist the wire together behind the chair. That's it. Now, I'll help."

"No; you needn't help. Stay where you are and tell me what to do."

"All right. Take a shorter wire now. Draw it around his throat, so that it is directly across his Adam's apple and fasten it behind his head to the top of the back of the chair. I see that you have got the idea perfectly. He won't be able to move his head now, will he, without choking himself?"

"No; he couldn't move it a quarter of an inch."

"Very good. Now wire his feet to the legs of the chair. First his right one; then the left one. Make them secure, doctor."

"Oh, I'll do that. You needn't worry."

"That's all right. Now wait a moment until I remove those handcuffs—so. Now give me a piece of that wire, and while I fasten his right hand down along the side of the chair, you do the same thing for the left one."

The man who was the victim of all this procedure had remained perfectly quiet till now; but now his curiosity and his anxiety could stand it no longer, and suddenly he cried out:

"What in blazes are you two trying to do with me, anyhow?"

Patsy remained silent. He offered no response to the question.

"I say," called out the prisoner again, "what are you trying to do? What are you going to do with me?"

"I asked you a moment ago who you were," replied Patsy quietly. "You told me to find out and that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to find out."

"Oh, well, if that's all you want to know, you needn't have gone to all that trouble. I'll tell you easy enough. I'm Bill Hurly—Black Bill, they calls me; them as knows me best."

"I expect that your picture is down in Mulberry Street, isn't it, Bill?" asked Patsy.

"They took it once; I don't know whether it's there now or not," he replied.

Patsy turned to the doctor again.

"Now, doctor," he said, "there is one more thing—or rather two or three more things to do before we get this Black Bill Hurly ready for the operation. There is a kitchen just off from the dining-room and I think you will find what you want there—a basin, a little warm water, a towel or two and—well you know better than I what will be required for such an operation."

"Sure," replied the doctor. "I'll get them at once." He thought he understood now what Patsy was going to do, and he knew his own part thoroughly.

"Look here, you!" shouted Hurly, after the doctor had left the room. "What are you going to try to do with me? What's that you were saying about an operation? Hey?"

"I'll tell you, Bill," was the slow reply. "I've got a lot of questions to ask you and I am afraid that you won't want to answer them correctly; I am afraid that you won't want to tell me the truth about certain things that I want to know, and so I'm going to fix you so that you will be only too glad to tell the truth."

"I'd like to know what you are going to do, then."

"This is Doctor Treat who is with me——"

"I know that well enough."

"Well, when he returns with the warm water and the other things, he is going to open a vein in your left wrist and he is going to let it bleed until you have answered all my questions and told the truth about each one."

"Open a *vein! Going to do what?*"

"Going to open a vein; going to bleed you; and if you don't talk fast enough you will bleed to death. Do you realize that?"

For a moment it seemed as if Black Bill was too horrified to speak; but at last he half-whimpered:

"Look here, covey, what's the mortal use in doing that? I ain't refused to tell you anything yet, have I?"

"Yes. You refused to tell me your name when I asked it the first time. I don't propose to have any more refusals."

"Well, just ask your questions, and leave that wrist of mine alone. I'll answer 'em all right, I will."

"Oh, I think we will start the vein in order to make sure. If you answer them all rapidly and truthfully, there will be very little danger. If we see that you are bleeding too fast and getting too weak, we will stop the bleeding. But I think to make sure of you, it had better be started. Don't you, doctor?"

"I think so—yes. He is so full blooded that we could take about two quarts away from him before he would be in real danger. Shall I open the vein now? Everything is ready."

"Hold on, there! Hold on, I say!" Black Bill shouted. "Didn't I say that I'd answer your questions. I will, so help me! You needn't go for to open that vein, gents. Please don't. I would jest as soon you'd kill me and have done with it. I tell you I'll answer. Why don't you ask some of them and see if I won't?"

"Shall I try him, doctor? Shall we give him one chance?" asked Patsy.

"Yes. Just one; and if he tries to dodge, I'll have that vein open in a second."

"All right. I'll give him a try. Do you hear, Bill?"

"Yes. I hear. Go on with your questions."

CHAPTER V.

BLACK BILL HURLY'S STORY.

"You assisted the people who were in this flat to escape, didn't you?" asked Patsy.

"Yes; I did, more's the pity. I ain't got nothin' in common with that outfit. I ain't——"

"You will do well to confine yourself to answers to the questions I ask you, Bill. If you should wish to offer any explanations after I am through, then will be time enough to listen to you."

"All right, sir. Fire away."

"They made their escape by way of the roof, didn't they? And you bolted the door after they had gone?"

"Yes, sir. That's right."

"They took Nick Carter with them, didn't they?"

"They did."

"And the young woman who was injured—they took her with them also, didn't they?"

"They sure did."

"But for some reason they carried her inside your flat before they took her out upon the roof—they took her in there and laid her on the couch in your dining-room, didn't they?"

"They sure did that, too, though how the blazes you know about it is more——"

"Did they also carry Nick Carter into your flat?"

"Yes. For jest a minute."

"Why were the two taken into your flat at all?"

"Because the swell guy wanted to make sure that neither of them would die before he got them where he wanted them."

"Did he make sure of that?"

"Yes; leastwise, he said so."

"How badly was Nick Carter hurt?"

"He wasn't hurt much—jest stunned, that's all. He wasn't hurt half so bad as the gal was, but even she was beginning to pull around all right when they was in my flat."

"Now, tell me who the young lady is. What is her name?"

"They call her Loris, that's all I know about her, except that she is the swell guy's wife's sister."

"Then the other woman present was the swell guy's wife, eh?"

"Yes."

"Who *is* the swell guy, as you call him?"

"He's a sport—a gambler—and I guess an all around crook as well."

"What is his name?"

"His wife called him Ralph and I heard him call her a funny name—Hermia, I think it was."

"Wasn't there another name that went with those two?"

"I think there was, boss, but I don't remember it."

"Was it Bolton?"

"Sure thing. You've got it first whop out uh the box. Say, you're a crackajack, you are."

"How many people were in this flat, all told, at the time the girl was struck with the black-jack? That is, how many were there without counting the girl who was hurt?"

"Five, not counting the girl."

"Were you one of the five?"

"Yes."

"Who struck the girl? Did you do it?"

"So help me, I didn't. Why should I hit a purty girl like that?"

"Who did strike her?"

"The swell guy—him they calls Ralph."

"Why did he strike her?"

"Because he was mad, I guess. It was the second break for liberty she had made within a few minutes, and that last time she lets drive a chair through the window and lets out a scream like a wild Injun, and then blow me if she didn't try to throw herself out of the busted window into the street."

"Go on. Tell me all about it."

"Well, him and the woman they says is his wife, took after the gal and they caught her just before she could get herself through the front window; and then when they were bringing her back into this room where we are now, blowed if she didn't turn and dig her nails into the swell guy's face so that she drew blood. And it made him so mad that he whirls around and grabs a black-jack out uh Sheeny Mike's hand and hands her one with it. I guess he struck her harder than he intended to, for he seemed sorry. And then Sheeny Mike bends over her and says she's dead. And then I skips into the hall to listen if anything has come of the screeching, and I hears the lower door give in, so I tips off the mob and we flies the coop for my ranch on the top floor, where we lies low and silent."

"Go on. There is more, isn't there?"

"Yes."

"You save me the trouble of asking questions when you tell your story so straight, and it may be that we won't have to touch that vein in your arm at all. Go on."

"Well, we lies low in my nest up there, with me a listenin' at the door."

"Well?"

"Bimeby I hear somebody sneak up the stairs and examine the door to the roof and then he goes down again, so I turns and reports the same to the swell guy. After that we waits a little longer, and then the swell he tips us the wink to keep quiet and he lets himself out through the door and tiptoes it down the stairs, with Sheeny Mike close behind him."

"So it was the man who is called Ralph Bolton, who crept up behind Nick Carter and hit him with the black-jack, was it?"

"I don't know whether it was him or Mike. It was one or the other of them, though. Anyhow, they hadn't been gone but a few minutes when they both comes back, carrying the girl between them. They takes her into my den and chucks her on the couch, and then her sister —the swell guy's wife, you know—falls all over her, weepin' like mad; and then we discovers that the girl ain't hurted so bad as it seemed."

"Go on. What next?"

"Well, when they chucked the girl down on the couch they went right out again without a word, and after a minute they comes back a-bringing Nick Carter between them. He was down and out, too. He had got a swipe across the head, almost in the same place where the gal was hit, but I saw that he wasn't much hurted, at that."

"What happened then?"

"They allowed that the climate war gettin' warm around there, especially for them. They had a get-away all fixed, you know. Most people in our line of business usually have a 'get-away' planned before they settles down anywhere. If they don't, they're fools."

"And this particular 'get-away' was across the roofs, was it?"

"Yes. There are two or three ladders along the route, but they were in place all right, 'cause that was part of the 'get-away.'"

"I see. Go on."

"By working the ladders you can make your way to First Avenue, and from there they had a way all fixed for going down through Chris. Dugan's saloon."

"And what was their destination after they left Dugan's saloon?" asked Patsy.

"That, so help me Joshua, I don't know. I ain't any more idea about that than you have. I want you to believe me cos I'm tellin' you the truth, and if I knowed I'd tell you."

The man was in such deadly earnest and he stood in such terror of the doctor and his lancet, that Patsy had no doubt that he was speaking the truth.

"Didn't they blind Nick Carter before they carried him across the roofs?" he asked.

"Sure they did; and they gave him a few whiffs of chloroform, besides; and then as if that wasn't enough, the swell guy shot something into him with a hypodermic; I reckon it was dope."

"And the girl—what of her?"

"They jest bandaged her head and carted her away, that's all."

"Now I want you to tell me *why it was* that they thought it wise to carry Nick Carter away with them, Bill."

"All that I know about that is what the swell guy said to his wife about it—that is he said it to the woman he called Hermia and also to the other two."

"The other two were Sheeny Mike and—you haven't mentioned the name of the other one. Who was he?"

"I don't know who he was or is; I only know what they called him, and that was Marston. He's another swell guy, only not so swell as his boss. He's a chap as is trying to be a crook and don't know how. You see I ain't got much use for amachewers in our profesh, and that feller is one all right, all right. He's cashier somewheres in a bank or a trust company that the mob is layin' to loot, and——"

"That will do for the present on that point. We will return to it again later. Tell me now what Bolton said to the others about taking Nick Carter away with them."

"I heard him say something about holding the thirteenth trump if they had Nick Carter in their power. I heard him say that they could keep him all right, where he couldn't get away, and that if he got too fresh it wouldn't be much trouble to slit his wizzen for him; and I heard him say this, to boot: He says, says he, 'If we spirit Nick Carter away and hide him in the place you know about where he can't be found, his assistants

will be so busy looking for him that they will forget all about Loris and us."

"And do you mean to tell me that you have no idea at all where that place is to which they intended to take Nick Carter and the girl?"

"So help me, sir, I haven't any more idea about it than you have. Maybe not so much."

"You don't think that they intended any violence to Nick Carter at the present time?"

"No; I don't. If they had intended that, they would have done for him down here in this flat before they took him up-stairs to mine. They wanted him for something else, I think. To make some sort of terms with him, I reckon."

"And the girl——?"

"Oh, they've got a scheme afoot for her which means that they want her alive and well."

"Do you know what it is?"

"No, I don't. I was just about to find out all the things you want to know when she made the first break for freedom. Then we hadn't settled down for a talk hardly, before she makes the second break; and things happened so swift after that that I didn't learn nothing at all that I went there to find out."

"But you were one of the gang, weren't you?"

"I was jest being taken into the deal. Sheeny is an old pal of mine. They needed another gun in the mob, and Sheeny sets out to find me. He found me yesterday and he gives up his little flat to me—that is, me and him were to live there together until the scheme was pulled off; see?"

"Yes."

"Well, this meetin' was the first one I had been at. It was the first time I had seen any of the mob at all. I was out in the early part of the night making a 'find' on my own account and I didn't get back here till one o'clock. I had just come down to this flat, after putting on some dry clothes, when the girl made the first break—and you know the rest as well as I do."

"But Sheeny must have told you something about what was doing when he asked you to join their mob, didn't he?"

"All he told me was that it was a lay in which the mob stood to pull off close to a million, and maybe more. It was a trust company job. I was to hear the details at this particular meeting. I went there, boss, as ignorant as you are now, and as things turned out I don't know much more now than I did then."

CHAPTER VI.

A PISTOL-SHOT ON THE TOP FLOOR.

"What do you know about the girl and her reasons for making one effort to escape and another to kill herself rather than remain where she was?" asked Patsy after a short pause.

"Well, sir, I hadn't got next to that lay yet. I don't really know nothing at all about her, only what I guessed from the little I heard."

"Tell me what you guessed, then. You were in a position to do some rather good guessing, I should imagine."

"Shall I tell you the story of the business jest as I sized it up?"

"Yes, Bill; that is what I want you to do."

"Mind you, I ain't sayin' that it's dead straight goods, because I hadn't a chance to be let in on the ground floor when the party broke up, but I sized it up this way."

"Well?"

"The swell guy—the one you say is called Ralph Bolton—has got a brother somewheres, or leastwise he did have one, by the name of Hiram, who is now or was, or something of that sort, the president of a trust company on Fifth Avenue; and Hiram had a wife whose brother—name of Horton—is the vice-president, or something like it, of the same outfit."*

"Yes," said Patsy, "I happen to know something about that."

"Well, the swell guy, Ralph, wants to absorb the boodle that is inside the vaults of that same trust company, and the girl was to be used somehow in helping him to get next to the job. Just how it was to be done, I don't know; only that she was expected to get on the soft side of the feller Horton, who is a bachelor, and susceptible, so they seemed to think.

"But it would appear that the girl Loris, has been brought up tender and good. There used to be three sisters in that outfit, two of which were naturally bad and this third one, who is the youngest, is just naturally good. Now that is as far as I had got along with their game and, so help me, it is all I know. What they intended to do with the sister I don't have the leastest idea at all—only that it was something that she didn't like; something that horrified her, and something that she said she would rather die than do."

"How long had those people been occupying this flat, Bill?"

"You can search me. I suppose they have been here some time. You must remember that I have only just come into the house, taking the flat on the top floor off Sheeny's hands, or rather sharing it with him."

"What will happen to you, Bill, if your pals find out that you have squealed on them?"

"Sheeny would cut me wide open the first time he saw me. If it's all the same to you and you ain't got nothin' on your mind for which you want to lock me up,

*See Nick Carter Weekly, No. 550.

I shall light out of this locality. It'll be the Pacific Coast for mine."

"But suppose I want you to help me find where they have gone? Suppose I offer you a good big roll to play stool-pigeon for me, Bill?"

"I wouldn't do it, boss—not if you opened the veins in both arms to try to make me."

"Why not?"

"Well, for one thing I ain't made of the sort of stuff that goes back on my pals. If this here affair had gotten along further than it had and if there had really been any crime committed for which you could hold Sheeny, I wouldn't have told you a thing; not with all the medical sawbones in the city standin' over me with their knives. Not me. But under the circumstances I says to myself that I ain't got much to tell anyhow, even if I tell all I know, and so I've done it. But as for playing stool-pigeon and spying on my friends, I draw the line at that, mister."

"The only friend you have got in the bunch is Sheeny Mike."

"Well, the others are *his* friends, and that amounts to the same thing."

"I suppose that Mike has been keeping under cover, here in the flat that you shared with him; eh?"

"Sure thing. Mike always keeps more or less under cover. He is never out in the open much, even when there is no reason for his keeping out of sight. Did you ever see Sheeny Mike, boss?"

"Not this one. There used to be a Sheeny Mike——"

"Oh! *Him*! He wasn't no good when compared with this one. I ain't going to tell you nothing about him, only this. I saw enough in those few minutes I was with the mob to know that Mike is dead stuck on the gal that tried to kill herself, and I guess it was a close call for the swell guy that Mike didn't do him, when he struck her."

"That is rather interesting," remarked Patsy.

"You bet your life it's interesting. You would say so if you knew Mike as I know him. He is a queer sort of a crook, is Mike. I'm the only man he ever worked in company with. He has always preferred to go it alone, and that was why I was so surprised when he opened up this deal to me."

"Because he wanted you to work in connection with a gang, or mob?"

"Yes. It ain't like Mike; and I knowed that something was doing. I grinned at him and then I asked him if he wasn't in love with the woman in the case—and he fetched me one which if I hadn't ducked would have laid me out for fair.

"But I knew then that I was right, and so I watched him; and it didn't take me long to size up the situation proper.

"Then, when the gal Loris dug her nails into the swell's face, and he fetched her a swipe with the jack, it was all made plain to me. If you could ha' seen Mike's face at that instant you wouldn't ha' wanted to stand in the swell's shoes.

"But he went down on his knees beside the gal instanter, and when he got up and said she was dead, I knew then that the swell hadn't very long to live on this earth.

"Then, later, when the swell goes out of my flat to sneak down to the other one to look around him, and Sheeny Mike raises up and follows him, I says to myself that it's all up with the swell now, if the gal is dead.

"And it would ha' been, too, you can bet your life on that. But they found that she was alive, and that saved the life of the swell guy. But when the outfit went away it was Sheeny who carried the gal."

"I take it," said Patsy with a smile, "that Sheeny Mike is quite the 'gentleman crook.'"

"Say, boss, you ought to see him. If you met him on the street you would think he was a duke or a prince; and he's that soft and polite and educated that you'd never suppose in a thousand years that he is a crook. He's as handsome as a girl, he is, and don't you forget it. I wish now that I hadn't said anything about him."

"You may comfort yourself by remembering that you have said very little about him, Bill. All that you have told me wouldn't hurt him much. Why is he called Sheeny Mike? Is he a Jew?"

"Nope; but we used to think he was, he's so dark. There; I ain't going to say any more about him. Now, mister, are you going to untie me and let me go free?"

"I don't know about that, Bill."

"If you will I'll pledge you my word that I'll light out of little old New York by the first train that'll take me West, and these pavements here won't feel my footsteps again for many a long day, either."

"But don't you understand that if you do light out——if you do run for it as you say, your friend Sheeny Mike will understand that you have peached on him?"

"I don't know how he'd know that."

"He would guess it."

"Mebby it would be better if you should take me down and lock me up, boss."

"No, Bill, I think I will turn you loose again. I think I will let you return to your flat and go to sleep once more. Your pals need not know that you have seen me at all, and you can go on with the game just as it was begun, or you can pull out of it quietly and easily, so that you won't stand to get nipped when we come down on you."

"Do you think that would be a good play?"

"I certainly do."

"And then, I suppose you'd be keeping some sort of tabs on me all the while, and that I would be doing the

stool-pigeon act whether I wanted to or not. That would be about the size of it, wouldn't it?"

"In any case, Bill, I don't propose to lose sight of you again. I am going to set you free now, and you are going back up-stairs to your flat on the top floor. If you try to light out of the city I'll have you stopped. Untwist some of those wires, doctor."

But as the doctor stepped forward to comply with the request, Patsy turned his head and caught sight of the jewels that Black Bill had poured out of the vase when he first entered the room.

The young detective had forgotten them entirely, so interested had he been in the crook's story; but now he called Bill's attention to them.

"Where do these come from, Bill?" he asked. "Doctor, leave the wires alone for a moment. Now, Bill, where did these jewels come from?"

"You can search me. I don't know," replied the crook doggedly.

"How did you know they were here, then?"

"The woman told me."

"What woman?"

"The swell guy's wife."

"How did she happen to tell you about them?"

"Well, she had them hid away where I found them. In the haste of leaving this flat she plumb forgot all about them, and not a memory of them came back to her until jest as she was going up the stairs toward the roof. Then she wanted to come back, but the others wouldn't let her."

"Well?"

"So she told me they was here and asked me to get them."

"What were you to do with them?"

"I was to keep them until she asked for them, or until Sheeny Mike asked me for them."

"I hardly think, Bill, that you are a safe custodian for all these jewels. They must be worth twenty thousand dollars at least. When Hermia Bolton asks you for them you tell her that Nick Carter's assistant, Patsy, is keeping them until they are called for. Now, doctor, I think you may turn him loose."

One by one the wires were unbound and presently Black Bill rose from the chair and shook himself much as a dog might have done it.

"I suppose I'm free to do as I please now, ain't I?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Patsy. "You can answer two or three more questions for me before you go, however."

"What are they?"

"Tell me something about Dugan's place on First Avenue."

"There ain't anything to tell about it, except that it—well, you know about as much about it as I do."

"It's a regular thieves' resort, isn't it?"

"That's what it's called. I ain't saying anything."

"Well, you may go now, Bill. Skip up to your own flat and go to bed. Sheeny Mike will be back there looking for you before long, and you ought to be there when he comes. You want to thank your stars that I am letting up on you so easy."

"Huh! I know mightly well that you wouldn't do it unless you thought you had something up your sleeve that is worth two of anything I can do. But maybe I ain't as helpless as I look; maybe I won't be as easy a mark now as you think I will; maybe you ain't as smart all around as you think you are."

With that he stepped through the doorway, closed it after him, and disappeared; and a moment later when Patsy had put out the lights and he and the doctor were following, they had just gained the main hall of the building when from the top floor there came the muffled report of a pistol.

"By Jove!" exclaimed Patsy; and he turned and ran up the stairs toward the top floor, three steps at a time.

CHAPTER VII.

SHEENY MIKE'S QUICK VENGEANCE.

It will be remembered that the scene that has just been described occurred on the third floor of the building and that Black Bill's little flat was located on the fifth floor—that is, two flights up from where Patsy and the doctor were standing when they heard the pistol-shot.

It sounded, as has already been described, somewhat muffled, as if the door of the flat were closed, and it was not so loud that it would particularly have attracted attention at another time or under different circumstances.

As it was, the instant he heard it, Patsy had no doubt whatever that it came from Bill's flat, and his instant decision was that Sheeny Mike had returned and not finding Bill in the flat on the fifth floor had sought him in the flat on the third floor.

And if he had done that, it followed that he had probably overheard more or less of the confessions of his one-time pal.

And if he had so overheard what Bill had been saying, what was more natural than that he should return to the flat on the fifth floor and there await his return, only to kill him in cold blood when he did appear?

But Patsy did not stop to reason all this out; indeed, as has been said already, the very instant he heard the report of the pistol he leaped for the stairs and started up them as fast as he could run, closely followed by the doctor.

Notwithstanding the quickness of his action, he saw nothing. There was no sign of anybody trying to escape.

When he tried the door of Black Bill's flat he found that it was locked against him—and so he pounded on the door, calling for admittance.

But there was no reply; and then, as Patsy turned to say a word to the doctor, who was directly behind him, his glance happened to fall upon the door of the stairway which led to the roof.

One look told him that the bolt was no longer in place—that somebody had passed out by that door quite recently.

With a bound he reached it and pulled it open and then he dashed up the stairs to the roof.

But already precious time had been lost. Patsy realized that, and he fairly threw himself out upon the roof in his eagerness to discover who it was escaping by that way.

Dawn was only just at hand, but there was sufficient light to see a considerable distance, and the wild storm which had made the night so hideous, had ceased.

And then, as he leaped out upon the roof, he could see, far across many houses toward First Avenue, the figure of a man running swiftly.

But the light was not strong enough and the distance was too great, for Patsy to see very clearly. He could only tell that it was a man.

He saw, moreover, that the man was about to make his escape, for already he was approaching the end of the block, and, realizing that he could not stop him unless he wounded him, the young detective drew his revolver and fired at the retreating figure.

But it was evident that his bullet had no effect, for the man kept on, and in another moment had disappeared entirely.

There was no sort of use in further pursuit, Patsy knew, so he turned back and reentered the house—to find that the doctor had been employing his leisure time in forcing the door of Black Bill's flat.

He had only just succeeded when Patsy joined him, and they entered the place together, not knowing what they expected to find, but realizing that a tragedy had occurred.

One had.

Black Bill was lying at full length upon his couch—the same one where Loris Dent had been put down temporarily—and there was a round bullet-hole straight between his eyes.

He had died instantly; there could be no doubt of that.

Nor was there any doubt in Patsy's mind that it was Sheeny Mike who had killed him, and whom he had fired at while running across the roofs.

Nevertheless the murderer had found time to give the tragedy the appearance of suicide, for the revolver with which the killing had been done was tightly clasped in the dead man's hand where it hung over the edge of the couch.

"This seems to have been a trade killing, doctor," said Patsy, with the ghost of a smile on his face. "I am going to ask you to report this thing for me to the police. They will take care of it. They will also think it is a case of suicide, and it is just as well that you should let them think so for the present."

"It certainly does look like suicide to me," said the doctor.

"I might have thought so myself had I not seen the murderer escaping over the roofs. It was Sheeny Mike, I have no doubt."

"Do you suppose he was waiting up here for Bill's return?"

"Without a doubt. I think that he must have crept down-stairs and have discovered that Bill was betraying him to us. Then he returned here and waited."

"That class of men won't stand for betrayals, will they?"

"No. If I leave you now will you look out for things here, and report this affair? You can use Nick Carter's name, you know—and mine also."

"Yes. I will attend to it."

"And by the way, doctor, don't let it be known, if you please, that anything has befallen the chief. It so happens that I know something about the people who were instrumental in taking him away, and I think I can get on their track, all right."

"I'll keep mum, all right."

"You remember, don't you," continued Patsy, "that when Bill was telling us all he knew, he referred to a brother of this Ralph Bolton, whose name was Hiram, and who was once president of the trust company they are now arranging to rob?"

"Yes. I remember."

"Well, the point of it all is this: Hiram Bolton and Ralph Bolton was all the time the same man playing two parts. As Hiram Bolton he was a financier and trust company president, while as Ralph Bolton he was an all-around sport, race-goer, gambler, and all that. He stole about a million and a half in cash from the company, and then he let Hiram disappear, leaving the wife and everything else that was Hiram's; don't you see?" *

"Yes."

"But he ran afoul of Nick Carter, and Nick nailed him down, finally arrested his wife—this same Hermia that Black Bill referred to—and him, just as they were on the point of leaving the country."

"But how does it happen that they are not in prison now? All of them?"

"It is a bit of foolishness that they are not, but the fact is that Ralph Bolton had all his swelling in cash; it was all packed in a couple of grips that Hermia had with her when Nick arrested her, and when it was counted afterward it was found that considerably less than a hundred thousand dollars was missing out of all that had been stolen."

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* See No. 1, New Weekly, No. 550.

"Well, I don't see the point yet. The crime was no less a crime simply because the money was recovered."

"No——but the fake Hiram's wife happened to be a sister of the vice-president and principal stockholder in the company. She didn't want the disgrace of it all to appear, don't you see?"

"Yes."

"It was hushed up. Horton made good what was lacking in the money, and the two guilty ones were allowed to go free on condition that they would leave the country."

"Which they did by coming over here on the East Side and taking a flat where they could plan another robbery which would be more successful than the first."

"Exactly."

"And now——"

"Now, since what Black Bill Hurly has told me, I know just about where to look for their next move."

"Look here, Mr. Garvan, you don't seem to be half as much exercised over the disappearance of your chief as I should think you would be."

"To tell you the truth I am not very greatly worried about him. I feel mighty sure that they won't do anything to injure him; at least not at once. If they had been intending that, they wouldn't have taken the trouble to cart him away from this house. The fact that he was carried away at all was simply one of the bold plays of Ralph Bolton's.

"You see, doctor, now that I know who I am up against, it is all very clear to me. Their safety and the success of their plans existed in the fact of secrecy. The moment that Ralph and Hermia Bolton's names were mentioned, I sort of knew where I was at. It was a lucky thing that we made Bill talk."

"It was an unlucky thing for Bill."

"I suppose so."

"Where are you going now, Garvan?"

"Around the corner to Dugan's saloon—just for a minute. Then I am going home and report this business to Chick; the first assistant. After that I don't quite know, for I will be acting under his orders. So long, doctor. I am greatly obliged to you for all that you have done for me."

"Don't mention it. I only wish that I could do more."

They parted then, and Patsy hurried around the corner in First Avenue, to Dugan's saloon; and if there is a more forlorn, disreputable-looking place in the world than a saloon of that character, in the early morning, I would like to hear of it.

Patsy walked straight up to the bar and when the man behind it came toward him, thinking that he wished to be served, Patsy said:

"I don't want anything to drink. I want to leave word with you for the boss—a message which I hope you will deliver to him as soon as he gets up; will you?"

"Sure thing."

"Tell him that early this morning—about two o'clock, it was—four crooks made their escape from a flat around the corner and having come across the roofs, came down to the street through this place; tell him that those four men carried two others who were unconscious, one of whom was a man and the other a woman; tell him that the man who was carried through here was the detective, Nick Carter; tell him that one of Nick Carter's assistants was around here this morning—that's me—to say that all the political pull in New York cannot save Dugan himself from state prison, and he knows why, if Nick Carter doesn't appear at his home this evening before dark."

The man behind the bar was so paralyzed by what he was listening to that he could only stare at Patsy open-mouthed.

"Have you got all that down in your memory, my son?" asked Patsy.

"I guess so. What's eatin' you, anyhow?"

"You pay attention and deliver these messages to Dugan, or you'll find that something has been nibbling at you. You may tell him also that Sheeny Mike has just shot and killed his pal, Black Bill, in that same house to which I have referred, and that after he did it, he also came across the roofs and made his escape through this place. Tell Dugan it is getting very much played out, and that if he wants to keep out of stripes himself, he has got to see that Nick Carter is turned loose unharmed, before dark to-night."

"Aw, g'wan! What's de matter wid you?"

Patsy leaned a trifle over the bar.

"I have just told you about Sheeny Mike coming through here, my friend. If I hear another peep out of you, I'll take you down to headquarters and lock you up for aiding him to escape after he had committed a murder."

"But how the blazes was I to know——"

"You weren't. I don't suppose you did know. I'll ask you not to forget to tell Dugan all that I have said for his benefit."

"Oh, I'll tell him——I'll tell him, all right."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SECRET ABOUT LORIS DENT.

As soon as Patsy arrived home his first act was to seek Chick in the study, and to make him thoroughly acquainted with all that had happened; and when he had finished, he added:

"There, Chick, is the whole story. I have done the best I could. I don't think I have omitted anything in the telling."

"You have made two mistakes, Patsy," said Chick. "One is, you have lost a great deal of valuable time.

You should have telephoned for me the moment you could—you should have sent that doctor out to telephone for you the moment you knew that Nick was missing."

"Well, maybe so. I didn't think of it."

"The other mistake was in going near Dugan's place."

"Why so?"

"Because there isn't any doubt in my mind that the whole outfit were right there in that place at the very time you were talking with the bartender; and if that is true, you had not been gone out of there five minutes before they were informed and making ready to leave; and all that you have said for Dugan's benefit won't have any more effect upon him than water on a duck's back. I am afraid, too, that it will tend more to increase Nick's danger, than to lessen it."

"How so?"

"Because you have made a threat against Dugan in Nick's name. Dugan—or some friends of his, and it is the same thing—have got Nick in their power now."

"I thought it was all for the best."

"I have no doubt of that. Now I will give you some orders for the day."

"All right, Chick. I'm ready."

"Ten-Ichi is up-stairs in his own room. I want you and Ten-Ichi to make yourselves up as a couple of young man-o'-wars-men. When you have done that, start in down in the Bowery at some place down there. Pick up a tough or two for company if you can, and make your way up to Dugan's place. When you get there stay there until you learn something, for that is the place to get news of Nick now."

"What are you going to do?" asked Patsy.

"I'll tell you. I'm going to play Nick's double. I have often done it as you know, and nobody, least of all any of that bunch, could ever guess that I am not the real article."

"I know that."

"As soon as I am ready, I shall go to the trust company offices and see Mr. Horton, and if I think it is policy I'll put him wise to the fellow Marston."

Patsy nodded.

"But after that I will probably call around to see Dugan, myself. I don't suppose he gets out of his bed until about one o'clock, so I will be around there about two. You ought to be there by that time."

"I'll be there all right."

"Well, you and Ten-Ichi must both bear this in mind: That no matter which one of that outfit shows up there at Dugan's, whether it is Ralph Bolton, Sheeny Mike, Hermia, or Marston, one of you must trail that person. One of them will be there, without a doubt. Put a piece of red chalk in your pocket, and if you do have to leave the place, make marks on the pavement, to let me know where you have gone."

As soon as Patsy had gone to his room, Chick began to change himself into a counterpart of his chief, Nick Carter.

The readers of the Nick Carter histories know that Chick had often done this thing; and it was a feat which he and Nick had practised together so often that they were absolutely perfect in it.

In less than half an hour at any time Nick could transform himself into Chick, and Chick could change himself to a perfect representation of Nick, and many are the times when this ability has served them both.

And now, when Chick descended the stairs, passing Joseph in the front hall on the way out, Joseph supposed it was his master; and even when in reply to a question he asked, Chick imitated the voice of the detective, Joseph did not know the difference.

Chick took his way at once to the trust company offices—the trust company of which Hiram Bolton had once been president—and sent Nick's card inside to Henry Horton.

"Ah, Mr. Carter," said that gentleman, as soon as Chick passed inside. "I am glad to see you. I am always glad to see you. Is this just a friendly call, or have you come on some sort of business this morning?"

"It's a little bit of both," replied Chick. "I wanted to ask you a question or two about that Bolton business."

"My dear sir! Why bring it up again at all? It is best forgotten."

"I am afraid that Bolton doesn't intend that you shall forget it, Horton."

"Eh? Why so? What do you mean?"

"My understanding of the case was that you refrained from pressing charges against him on condition that he and the woman Hermia should leave the country and never return to it. Is that right, Mr. Horton?"

"It is correct—yes."

"Have you an idea that they left the country?"

"I *know* that they did so."

"Well, they may have left the country. I won't venture to dispute with you on that point; but if they did leave it, they are back here again."

"Back here? Oh, no; you must be mistaken, Mr. Carter."

"Ralph Bolton was in this city, not two miles from where we are seated now, as late as two o'clock this morning, sir."

"Do you *know* that to be true, Mr. Carter?"

"I do know it to be true."

Horton shrugged his shoulders and spread out his hands rather helplessly.

"Well, even so," he said, "I don't see that I can do anything to prevent him from remaining here, unless I should press that old charge, and my sister Ruth—who is really his wife, you know—would never consent to that. But why should he return here at all?"

"He has returned here for the purpose of robbing this company again."

"Robbing *this* company. But how can he do that?"

"I don't know fully what his plans are. I only know that he intends to rob you; and I know also that there is some other scheme on foot against you—a scheme in which a young woman is involved. A young woman is to be imposed upon you in some way; I don't pretend as yet to know how it is to be done—"

"But, my dear Carter, all this is utterly preposterous, you know. How could I be imposed upon by any young woman? I am not a lady's man at all. Young women do not interest me. I take no interest in them, whatever."

"This girl's name is Loris Dent, and——"

The banker started to his feet.

"*Loris Dent!*" he interrupted.

"The name seems to be familiar to you," said Chick dryly.

"It is, of course. Why should it not be so, since it is the name of a ward of mine?"

"Come," said Chick, "we are getting warm, as we used to say in childhood. You say that Loris Dent is your ward—where is this Loris Dent, who is your ward? Where is she at the present moment, if you know?"

"She is somewhere between here and Chicago, on the cars, on her way here, sir. She is due to arrive here this evening, at the Grand Central Station."

"Indeed! That is interesting. Will you tell me what sort of looking girl she is?"

"To tell you the truth, I don't know, save that she is a blonde. I have been told that much. I have never seen her."

"How does it happen that you are her guardian, then?"

"James Dent, her father, was with me in college. We were chums. Ultimately he married and went to California. His wife died when Loris was born. Two years ago James died. He had amassed quite a fortune, which he left to his daughter, and in his will I was appointed guardian of the young lady as well as sole executor of the will. She was at a seminary at the time and I directed that she remain there. Now, that she has graduated, I have thought it best to have her come here. My sister intends to assume the charge of her."

"All very nice. It fits in splendidly with the plots of your enemies. But the Loris Dent who will appear at your house to-night is not the real Loris Dent, but an impostor, whom Ralph Bolton and Hermia intend to palm off on you. I happen to know this."

"But, my dear sir, how can it be possible when——"

"Were you to meet the young lady at the train?"

"I intended to send the carriage for her, of course."

"On what train is she expected to arrive?"

"It is due at six o'clock."

"Well, Mr. Horton, it is unfortunate that I cannot be in two places at once, or I would go to that train for you. I will, however, give you this one tip."

"Yes."

"If the young lady who arrives at your house should show evidences of having recently received a painful blow on the side of her head over the temple, she is an impostor, no matter how she explains its presence there. Do you understand that?"

"Yes, sir; but are you certain of what you say?"

"I am absolutely certain."

"Then what am I to do in the matter?"

"Nothing at all until you have sent for——for me. *Don't let the young woman suspect that you doubt her;* but remember, if there is any sign of a bruise on her head, she is *not* the Loris Dent whom you are expecting."

"I will remember. But what, in that case, has become of the real Loris? What will have happened to her?"

"Who can say? I cannot tell you that until I get Ralph Bolton once more where I can make him talk."

"And do you think you can do that?"

"I think it will be done before to-morrow morning."

"But, Carter—let me ask you——"

"Yes?"

"Ought not something to be done at once to offer protection to Loris—the real Loris, I mean? Ought I not to telegraph to the conductor of the train she is on to look out for her? Isn't there something that can be done?"

"As I look at it, Mr. Horton, there isn't a thing that can be done—now."

"But——"

"If nothing has happened to her up to the present moment, nothing will happen to her, at least until she arrives in New York. If there has been any real danger, antedating her arrival in the city, the axe has fallen long before this. If I can make it, I will be at that six-o'clock train myself to-night."

"Thank you, Carter. I wish you would do so. Couldn't you send that splendid assistant of yours, Chick, you call him, in case you cannot go yourself?"

Chick smiled with amusement as he replied that he would do his best.

"And now, Mr. Horton," he said, "there is another thing that is necessary for us to touch upon. You have a cashier here by the name of Marston, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Is he in the building now?"

"Yes."

"Send for him. Have him come in here. I have something that I wish to say to him in your presence. What is his first name?"

"Isaac."

"All right. Send for him."

CHAPTER IX.

THE STORY OF A DOUBLE PLOT.

The banker rang the bell and gave the necessary order; and then, when they were again alone, Chick said to him:

"Mr. Horton, when Marston enters the room I want you to watch him closely, but to say nothing. Unless I am very much mistaken, Marston will show great surprise at seeing me here so early to-day."

There was a short wait of two or three minutes, and then a gentle tap upon the door. It was Chick who called out, "come in!" and Isaac Marston stepped blithely and smilingly across the threshold.

He was inside the room and had closed the door behind him before he discovered Chick, who, it will be remembered, was made up to look exactly like his chief, Nick Carter.

But when Marston saw him he stopped still in his tracks, with one foot half-poised. The smile died out of his face, his lower jaw dropped and his complexion turned to the hue of ashes, while his whole form trembled with surprise and terror.

Chick was smiling blandly upon him, noting the effect that his presence—the supposed presence of Nick Carter—had produced.

"Sit down, Mr. Marston," he said blandly. "Mr. Horton and I desire to have a short talk with you. Be seated."

For an instant the man hesitated. It seemed almost as if it was his intention to turn and make a break for liberty; but then as if he recognized the utter futility of such a proceeding, he dropped, rather than seated himself, upon a chair.

"You didn't expect to see me here this morning, did you?" Chick asked him.

Marston could not reply. He could only stare and gasp and tremble with terror. The presence of Nick Carter in that room at that time meant his utter ruin—meant arrest and imprisonment for him; and he had not a doubt in the world that the man who sat facing him was the detective himself. It must be remembered that Patsy had told every detail of the events of the preceding night to Chick, and that the latter was as familiar with them as if he had been in Patsy's place.

Chick glanced past Marston toward Horton, and he saw that the banker was astounded by the demeanor of his cashier—but true to the instruction he had received, he said nothing.

"Marston," said Chick, and now his voice changed to a tone of uncompromising sternness, "up to the present moment I have said nothing about you to Mr. Horton. At this moment he is as ignorant of what you have been plotting and planning, and of the company you were in last night, as he was before I came here to tell him. I have left the story for you to tell, Mr. Marston."

"For—me—to—tell?" gasped the cashier.

"Yes. I think if you will make a clean breast of all there is to tell, if you will give away the entire plot against this institution and also the one against Mr. Horton's ward——I think if you will do all that without equivocation or mental reservation, that I may, in Mr. Horton's name, promise you immunity. I believe that if you will reveal everything, from the beginning to the end, concerning those plots in which you are engaged with Ralph Bolton against this trust company and against Mr. Horton personally—I believe in that case that you will be permitted to leave the country, and to seek a new life and a new career in some other part of the world. Do you understand me, sir?"

There were tears in Marston's eyes now. He was leaning forward with his burning eyes fixed hungrily upon Chick, and now, at the closing question, he replied:

"Yes. I understand. I understand."

"What the devil does it all mean, Carter?" broke in Horton, who could no longer maintain the silence that had been imposed upon him.

"Wait, sir," replied Chick. "You will soon understand."

"But there is one thing which I wish to understand at once, if you don't mind. Is Marston mixed up in this business you have been telling me about?"

"He is."

"The robbery of this company and also the substitution of an impostor for my ward?"

"Yes."

"Then by Heaven, I will *not* promise him immunity. I——"

"Please wait, Mr. Horton. I think you will reconsider that statement if I ask you to do so. You have always found that my advice was good, have you not? I do not ask favors idly; and now I want you to tell this man, if you will, that if he makes everything quite clear concerning the plot against the bank and the plot against your ward, that you will not prosecute him."

"I——"

"Remember that he has committed no crime as yet. He is only preparing to commit one. If we can save him from this one and so keep him out of prison, possibly it will serve as a life-long lesson to him. He will have come so close to the brink that when he has gone away from here to another country to begin a new life, he will steer clear of the shoals in the future. Isn't that so, Marston?"

Great tears were rolling down Marston's cheeks now, although he seemed unconscious of the fact; but at the question he partly lifted his head and replied:

"It is true as you say, sir."

"Are you willing now to tell us the whole story, from beginning to end?"

"Yes, sir. I will tell it whether I am prosecuted or not. You shall hear it all."

"That is the way to talk; and I think that I can renew the promise that you will not be prosecuted. I am sure that I can convince Mr. Horton of the wisdom of that promise."

"Oh, well, Carter," said the banker, "if you are set upon having it that way, all right. Marston, I don't know what you have done or what you have been planning to do—I think I am too greatly shocked to realize fully just what is happening—but I will stand by any promise that Carter makes to you in my name. And now, for goodness' sake, let's get at the pith of this interview. Tell your story to Carter. Don't tell it to me. I will listen."

"You must tell it," said Chick, "as if I knew nothing about it already; as if I were a third person in the affair. Now, proceed."

"Which shall I tell you first? That about the trust company or about Miss Dent?"

"Begin at the beginning, no matter which phase of the story is taken up first. Begin with your first interview with Ralph Bolton after his association with the company came to an end."*

"My association has never ceased with him at all, sir."

"Ah, indeed! How is that?"

"While he was here masquerading as Hiram Bolton and acting as president of this company, I committed my first indiscretion—and he discovered it. From that moment I have been in his power and he has never failed to exercise it. He always held over me the fact that he could disgrace me and send me to prison if he chose to do so. From being not at all bad, but merely foolish, I became reckless—but I need not dwell upon that."

"No; come down to the facts we wish to hear about."

"After his disappearance from here, I supposed I was rid of him. I think I would have been so, had you not discovered the fraud he was playing and shown him up—had you not developed the fact that Hiram Bolton was only Ralph Bolton in disguise."

"Well?"

"After the arrest, when Mr. Horton refused to prosecute on condition that Ralph Bolton and the woman, Hermia, would leave the country, I supposed again that I would be free. But it seems that they only crossed to the other side, to return again at once. They were not absent from New York four weeks, when they were back again; and no sooner had they returned than Bolton sent me a peremptory order to visit him."

"Where?"

"At the house in Fourteenth Street, where you saw him, Mr. Carter—or, at least, where you knew him to be last night."

"Very well; go on."

"I went there. I found that he and the woman Hermia were living there, and that they had with them a sister of hers—a very beautiful young woman whose name is Loris Bentley. And I would like to say here, that I firmly believe that young woman to be as good as she is beautiful. She is not at all like her sister Hermia, who is a natural crook. I have been told that there was another sister once whom you arrested. Her name was Madge Bentley. She was known as Black Madge, the queen of crooks. She was a half-sister, and very dark, whereas these two are blondes."

"Never mind that. Go on."

"In the same building, on the top floor, lived a crook by the name of Mike Sheehan, who for some reason is called Sheeny Mike, although he is Irish."

"Well?"

"Ralph Bolton, Hermia, and this Sheeny Mike had concocted a plot between them whereby they were to rob this trust company, but they needed my assistance in order to carry it out successfully—*and I was given the choice of joining in with them and participating in the pro-*

*See Nick Carter Weekly, No. 550.

ceeds of the robbery, or of having my past misdeeds brought up and being made to suffer for them."

Chick nodded understandingly.

"I will make no excuses for myself, sir. There are none. Being tempted, I fell. I was made to understand that I should have an equal share in the proceeds of the robbery with them, and that after that I could remain where I was, or I could leave the country, as I pleased."

"Well?"

"You see, they needed me in order to get into the bank without too much work; they needed me to set the time-lock on the vaults so they could be opened without difficulty, at any time when we should decide to do it, and they needed me to tell them when the time was ripe for the robbery, because they wished to select a time when there would be an unusually large amount of cash here. You understand that, sir?"

"Yes."

"It was decided finally that they needed one more hand in the affair, and Sheeny Mike undertook to find the man. He was there last night, present with us for the first time. His name is Bill Hurly."

"Go on," said Chick.

"The meeting last night was to decide upon a time for the robbery here, and it was decided that it should take place some night next week; any night when I should notify them that the amount of cash on hand in the vaults exceeded a million; *and then, last night, for the first time, I heard about the other plot.*"

"You refer now, I suppose, to the plot against Miss Dent, who is Mr. Horton's ward?"

"Yes."

"And you heard nothing of that until last night?"

"No; and I would not have heard about it then if it had not been for Loris Bentley herself. I should say here that she had always been present at our interviews, but had never taken an active part in them. She did not seem to belong there, and I had determined that, like myself, she was forced into it against her will."

"Well?"

"When we had discussed the question of the projected robbery and had decided upon it, the other question was brought up, and Bolton related to me the facts of it. He had been familiar with the existence of Loris Dent, of California, ever since that young woman was left to the care of Mr. Horton. He knew that Mr. Horton had never seen her. He knew that Loris Dent was an heiress to great wealth, and it was his plan to substitute Loris Bentley for Loris Dent. It is a plan that could have been worked, too, if Miss Bentley had not objected. But in the very midst of the arrangements, she absolutely refused to have anything to do with it."

"But evidently," said Chick, "she has been forced to change her mind since then."

"No, she has not changed her mind," said Marston. "But Hermia Bolton has taken her place in that part of the plot. It is Hermia, not Loris, who will play the impostor to-night."

CHAPTER X.

THE KIDNAPING PLOT REVEALED.

"So, notwithstanding all that has happened, the young woman still persists in her refusal to join in the plot, does she?" asked Chick.

"I supposed you knew, sir," said Marston. "She could not take part in the plot now, even if she were willing. You know, of course, that Bolton struck her on the head with a black-jack; I thought you were aware, also, that she has not recovered consciousness since, and that she was taken to a private room in the New York Hospital this morning. It is doubtful if she will live."

"At the New York Hospital? Under what name?"

"Her own, Loris Bentley."

"Thank you. I will take an interest in her later. Go on, now, with your story. You say that it was decided that Hermia should play the part of Loris Dent. Tell us, now, what has been done or what will be done to prevent Loris Dent from appearing in person?"

"Sheeny Mike and Hermia have already started for Albany to meet the train which is bringing her here. I don't know just what their plans are. I only know that they are to board the train at Albany, or beyond that, if they have the time to go farther—perhaps at Syracuse; who knows?—and that in some manner Miss Dent is to be deprived of her trunk-checks and keys. Mike is to look out for her and see that she is not permitted to interfere with the plans against her, and Hermia is to assume her place and is to step from the train when it rolls in at the Grand Central, as Loris Dent. And she will have the baggage, the keys, and everything to prove that she is the heiress."

"And after that?" asked Chick.

"After that? Heaven only knows what her fate might be after that, if the plot were permitted to succeed. But I see plainly now that it will not."

"Do you mean to tell me, Marston, that you would have remained silent while this hellish business was going on?" asked Chick sternly.

"I don't know. I don't know what I would have done."

"Thank Heaven you have revealed the whole plot in time to prevent any real catastrophe. And now I wish to touch upon another part of what happened last night, Marston."

"Yes, sir."

"Loris Bentley made two efforts to escape from her tormentors, did she not?"

"Yes."

"And the last one was when she threw a chair through the front window, and then tried to leap out of it and kill herself. It was right after that when Bolton struck her on the head, was it not?"

"Yes."

"And then, for some reason, you all fled to the flat on the top floor; then Nick Carter—that is to say, then I was smashed over the head, as she had been, and we were both carried to that flat on the fifth floor; and then, a few moments later, the whole party, with the exception of Bill Hurly, escaped across the roofs and descended through a saloon that is run by a man named Dugan. All that is correct, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Now, Marston, I am going to say something that will surprise you. It will also surprise you, Mr. Horton. You have both been talking here with me, believing that I am Nick Carter; but the fact is I am *not* Nick Carter at all. I am his first assistant, Chickering Carter."

Neither of the men made any remark in reply to this statement. They only stared their amazement.

"Marston," said Chick, after a moment of silence, "I want you to tell me now exactly where Nick Carter was taken, after you left that house in Fourteenth Street by way of the roof. I want you to tell me where he is now. I want you to tell me exactly how badly he was hurt."

"I will tell you all I know," replied Marston. "But first I wish to tell you this, even though you are not Nick Carter, which it seems impossible to believe even yet, I am glad that I have made the confession I have, and I hope that Mr. Horton will still decide to give me a chance to make a new start in life."

"You shall have all that has been agreed to," said Horton. "You need have no fear of that."

"And now reply to my questions," said Chick. "Where is Nick Carter now?"

"I can tell you that, although I do not know exactly where the house is. But Dugan, the saloonkeeper, has another place in Rivington Street—I don't suppose you will have any difficulty in finding it. It is even a worse place than the one in First Avenue. Nick Carter was taken there. They all went there, after they made their escape."

"You did not go with them?"

"No. I left them as soon as we descended from the roof into Dugan's place in First Avenue."

"Who was it who went back again, to the house in Fourteenth Street? Was it Mike or you, or was it Bolton?"

"It was Bolton. He was afraid that Hurly would not play his part well and might be induced to give things away, and he took Mike's key to the house and went back there to see how things were going. I did not await his return."

"So you did not know that he murdered Hurly when he got back there, did you?"

"Great Heaven, no! Did he do that?"

"Shot him dead—yes. For Hurly had betrayed them, as far as he could. He had told all he knew, which wasn't very much, but which was enough to put us on the right track. It was Hurly who supplied your name, Marston, and, of course, that revealed the whole plot, in part."

"I am glad now that he did it."

Chick turned then to the banker.

"Mr. Horton," he said, "this day bids fair to be a busy one for me. I think that Marston is very sincere in his professions of regret and sorrow for what he has done. I think he means to be a better man and to live a better life in the future."

"Indeed I do, sir."

"So, Mr. Horton, I have this to suggest: Let Marston return to his work now as if nothing had happened, and let him remain there, ostensibly with the same authority as before, until all these matters are cleared up. May we depend upon you, Marston, to do your duty now? And may we depend upon you, in consideration for the

clemency that is to be shown you, to give your evidence regarding all this business, at the right time?"

"You may, sir; I swear it by all that I hold sacred."

"All the same, Marston, I shall send a man here to keep an eye on you until the time comes when you will be permitted to go your own way unmolested. Now, go back to your duties, and try to appear and act as if nothing had happened."

"I am happier—far happier, than I was before you called me in here, sir."

"I haven't a doubt of that."

As soon as he was out of the room, Chick turned to Horton.

"Now," he said, "I will give you a few directions which I hope you will carry out. The first one is that as soon as I have finished, you must telephone to police headquarters and ask that a detective be sent up here to you at once. When he comes, you must tell him that his duty is not to lose sight of Marston—and that is all you need tell him.

"The second one is, that when the bank closes for the day, I wish you to go directly to Nick Carter's house. If I am not there, wait there until I come or until you hear from me."

"And you—will you tell me what you are going to do?"

"I am going first, of course, to rescue my chief from the hands of the men who hold him—if he has not already escaped."

"I wish I might go with you, Chick."

"It is hardly the place for you, sir. The president of of a great trust company would not be in his element in such a place as that."

"But you will take help with you?"

"Probably help will not be far off, if I should need it. But you see their forces are very greatly depleted just now."

"How is that?"

"Bill Hurly is dead; Sheeny Mike and Hermia are already in Albany, or beyond that point, and Marston is here in the bank. That leaves only Ralph Bolton to be reckoned with."

"He is a dangerous man, my friend."

"Oh, I know that well enough. However, I don't think I will borrow any trouble on that account."

"But you will not fail me in regard to meeting that train to-night at six o'clock?"

"No. I will not fail you. The probability is that Nick Carter and I will both be there."

"I hope so, I'm sure."

"It is understood, then, that you will remain here until three o'clock or a little after, and that then you will go directly to Nick's house."

"Yes."

When Chick was upon the street again he called a cab and had himself driven home as rapidly as the horse could make it; and arrived there, he called Joseph into the library with him.

"If Danny Maloney, the chauffeur, is in the house, send him to me at once," he said.

"He is, sir. He only just came in."

And as soon as Danny appeared Chick said to him:

"Danny, you are an East Side boy yourself, are you not?"

"Yes, sir."

"Do you know a place called Dugan's, in Rivington Street?"

"I know it well, sir. It's a bad place, all right. He has got another——"

"Yes. I know about that. Patsy and Ten-Ichi are even now at that other place in First Avenue. I wonder, Danny, if you could do a little detective business?"

"Try me, sir. Only give me a chance."

"I will. Go to your room and fix yourself up to look like an East Side tough. You ought to know how to do that."

"I do, sir. I can do it to the king's taste."

"Good! When you have done it, go to Dugan's place, in First Avenue. Patsy and Ten-Ichi are disguised as man-o'-war's-men. If they are not there when you get there, wait until they do arrive. If they are there, get into conversation with them at once and tell them that I want them at the other Dugan place, in Rivington Street, as quickly as they can get there. Tell them that that is where the chief is being detained. Now, skip! Lose no time. You can go with them to show them the way, if you want to. That's all."

"I'd like to say just one thing, sir, that might be of help to you."

"Say it."

"I know the inside of that place of Dugan's, in Rivington Street, from the roof to the cellar, and when it comes to looking for the chief among that maze of rooms, it might be that I can be of assistance to you."

"Good! I'll not forget that. Skip, now, Danny. There isn't any time to lose. And remember your instructions to the letter."

"Never fear, sir; I'll do that, all right."

Before Chick left the house again, he strode across the room and studied himself in the glass—himself as the counterpart of Nick Carter. He was asking himself the question whether it would be better to disguise himself, or to go to that den of infamy as he was.

He stood for a full minute turning the matter over in his mind, and then he decided that he would make no change at all. While it was likely that he would incur some danger, if he was really thought to be the detective, he still believed that it would work to his advantage in other ways—and, besides, it was in the middle of the day.

Having decided, he hurried outside, and thence to Third Avenue, where he took the elevated road down-town.

CHAPTER XI.

NICK CARTER'S BREAK FOR LIBERTY.

We have left Nick Carter so long a time that it is now necessary that we should return to him.

You will remember that he was bending over the silent form of the young woman on the couch in the flat in Fourteenth Street when, hearing a sound behind him, he attempted to turn about, but that before he could do so he received a blow on the head which sent him senseless to the floor.

It will be recalled, also, that in Black Bill Hurly's confession he related how Ralph Bolton had not only administered chloroform to the detective, but as if that were not sufficient, he had also dosed him hypodermically with some sort of "dope." It is not, therefore, surprising, that Nick Carter remained unconscious for a considerable time.

He had no recollection whatever of anything at all from the moment he received the blow, until he came to his senses in a gloomy and evil-smelling room, and discovered that he was tied down upon an iron bedstead which had been pulled away from the walls of the narrow place.

His head was aching terrifically, and he experienced a feeling of nausea—a fact which told him plainly that he had been drugged.

Of course he had not the least idea where he was. All he knew was that he was not in the house where he had been attacked, for the very character of this room precluded such an idea.

But wherever he was, he realized that he had been tied down to that bed by experienced hands.

There is a form of tying which is a favorite among a certain class of crooks, which is known as the "Letter X." And that was how the detective had been fastened down.

It is done by stretching the victim on a bed on his back. Then four ropes are used—one for each ankle and one for each wrist.

A slip-knot is made around each extremity and then the ropes are drawn tightly and made fast to each corner of the bedstead, and tied down in this way, a man is absolutely incapable of doing anything to liberate himself.

Even if he is gifted with the great strength possessed by Nick Carter, it is useless to him, for his arms and legs being stretched to their utmost limit, there is no opportunity to make use of the muscles at all.

The detective gazed about him as far as his position permitted him to see, and discovered that the room was evidently on the top floor of an old-fashioned house, and from its general character he believed it to be located somewhere on the old East Side.

For a long time he remained silent, thinking over all that had occurred, and wondering what had happened to Patsy. He wondered, too, why, having knocked him down, his enemies had thought it worth while to bring him away.

After a little he discovered that he was thirsty, and so he called aloud:

"Hello! Hello, there, somebody!"

Almost at once he heard a movement in the next room, and presently a door opened, and a villainous-looking fellow slouched into the room.

"Shut up yer trap, blast ye! What are you yelling about, anyhow?" he grumbled. "What d'ye want, covey?"

"I want a drink of water," replied the detective.

"Water! Huh! Well, I reckon water's cheap, if that's all you want."

He brought a glass of it from somewhere, and managed to spill half of it over the detective while he was assisting him to drink; and then he said:

"I might as well tell you that if you yell like that again, my orders are to gag you. That wouldn't be pleasant, so you'd best keep that trap of yours closed."

"Do you know who I am?" asked the detective.

"Oh, yes. I know well enough who you are, Nick Carter. But jest now it don't make no sort uh difference who you are, I reckon. You ain't going to get out of this fix that you're in until your claws have been cut—some."

"How do they propose to cut them?" asked Nick.

"I reckon you'll have to ask the boss that question."

"I'd like to. Who is the boss."

"You'll have to ask him *that* question, too."

"Then *where* is the boss?"

"Jest now he's takin' a nap in the other room—unless that racket of your'n woke him up."

"Would you be so good, then," said the detective, smiling grimly at his own plight, "to go back into that room and ascertain if he is awake? And if it should happen that he is, will you ask him to do me the distinguished honor of granting me an interview?"

"Say, mister, would you mind saying that all over again and saying it slow? Anyhow, he's coming. You'll see him now, I reckon."

The next instant Ralph Bolton appeared at the bedside and stood there staring down in silence upon his captive; and for once in his life Nick Carter had to confess to himself that he was surprised.

"So," he said, for he was the first to speak, "it is Ralph Bolton whom I have to thank for this plight? I wonder why you didn't kill me outright, and have done with it? Or not having done that, I am wondering why you brought me here and let me know who it was hit me?"

"I didn't kill you because I dislike murder—unless it is absolutely necessary. My original idea in bringing you here was to keep you out of the way until some things I had planned were accomplished. But now things have taken a different turn, Carter, and I am very much inclined to think that your life will have to pay the forfeit."

"Indeed?"

"That is, unless you are amenable to reason."

"What sort of reason?"

"Well, I happen to know that you are a man of your word. I have been thinking over your case, and I have decided to spare your life, and even to set you free, after those things to which I have referred are done, on a condition."

"What is the condition?"

"Merely that you give me your promise that personally you will not take up the chase against me; that you will not permit any of your assistants to do it; and that neither you nor they will give any information about me, or those who are concerned with me, to others."

Nick was silent.

"It is merely a promise on your part to keep your hands off, that's all. If you agree, I will keep you here, a prisoner, until my job is finished, and then you will be released; if you refuse, I will have to put you out of the way. Take your choice."

"I'll have to think it over a bit, Bolton," said the detective.

"You may think it over until ten o'clock to-night. That is final, Carter."

He was turning away, when Nick called to him.

"What time is it now?" he asked.

"It is eleven o'clock in the forenoon," was the reply.

"Was it last night that—that I got this swipe over the head?"

"Yes."

"That is all, thank you. I will give you your answer at ten to-night, if you ask me for it. I suppose there is no use asking you where I am now?"

"You are in my power; that is sufficient. You cannot escape it, either; and you are where no one is apt to find you, if they search a thousand years. If you want anything, ask this fellow for it. He has orders to wait upon you and to treat you decently."

Bolton passed into the adjoining room and closed the door, and as the other individual followed him, Nick was again alone.

At first he tried straining upon the cords that held him, but he quickly discovered that it was no use; and then, presently, he heard Bolton pass out of the adjoining room into the hall and thence descend some stairs, and he knew that he had been left to the mercy of his jailer.

After a little he called to him.

"Well, what's the matter now?" asked the man, coming into the room.

"I was wondering," said Nick calmly, "if you could be bribed to set me free."

"Narry a bribe, mister. I'd do it quick enough, if I dared, if the price was all right—but I don't dare."

"Why not?"

"Oh, I ain't afraid of this covey what's been talking to you; but I ain't runnin' up against Sheeny Mike; not if I can help it."

"So! Sheeny Mike is in this game, too, is he?"

"He is; and he ain't a man to be fooled with, either."

"So I have heard. Where is he now?"

"He's gone out of town—him an' the woman."

"What woman? Hermia?"

"That's what they calls her, yes."

"Say, my friend, I'll tell you what you can do, if you won't set me free. There ought to be a roll of money in my trousers pocket, on the right side."

"There is, boss; only I was ordered not to touch it."

"You were, eh? Well, there is no reason why I shouldn't give it to you, or part of it, at least. I'll tell you what I'll do, I'll give you half of all there is there—and there is considerable—and will say nothing about it to the others, if you'll loosen up the ropes on my hands long enough for me to rest my arms a bit. I can't get away, you see, with my feet still tied, and you can sit there beside me with a gun in your hand. What do you say? Eh?"

"I'd like to do it, but if——"

"Tut, tut! No ifs. Feel in my pocket. Get out that wad and take half of it. Then put the other half back and loosen the ropes so that I can get my hands down for a little while. I think there is about two hundred in that pocket, so you will get a hundred for doing very little."

"And you won't tell on me?"

"Certainly not."

"Then I'll risk it."

He shoved his hand into Nick's pocket, drew out the money, counted it, took half, returned the remainder to the pocket, and then passed around to the head of the bed, where he began to work at the ropes, loosening them; and it was not long before the detective felt them relax, first one and then the other, and presently both arms were free so that he could draw them down at his sides.

For a moment he remained very quiet, sighing with relief; but then, as the man came again to the side of the bed, Nick said to him:

"Come here a moment. I want to tell you something."

Without suspicion the man came close to the bedside and leaned down over the detective; and the instant he did so, Nick Carter's two arms shot upward and encircled his bull-like neck and drew him irrevocably down, hugging him against himself as a grizzly bear might have done it, and almost with the same gigantic strength. And then, although the man threshed and struggled with all his might, Nick held him with his left hand while he transferred the fingers of his right hand to the fellow's throat—and then he shut down upon the windpipe with all the strength he possessed.

It was only a few moments before the struggles of Nick's jailer ceased altogether, for he was choked into insensibility—and then the detective pushed him aside, and in a moment more had freed himself entirely from the bonds that held him.

After that he took time only to fasten the man to the bed in exactly the same position he had been in, and then, having sought around the two rooms until he found his own coat and a hat that he could wear, he opened the door into the hallway and stepped outside, once more free, and master of his own acts.

CHAPTER XII.

THE DETECTIVE'S LITTLE TRAP.

The hallway was dark, but the detective found his way down the stairs easily enough, and for a wonder they did not creak and groan beneath his weight.

He descended two flights in this way and then decided that he was on the ground floor, but the door which gave out upon the street had been nailed up, and so he turned back through the hallway to discover another means of exit.

By feeling along the wall, he at last discovered a door, away at the rear; and at the same instant he was conscious of voices beyond it, engaged in some sort of a dispute. This dispute was almost instantly followed by a loud crash, and then there was a pistol-shot.

Nick opened the door cautiously, nevertheless, for he was unarmed; but the instant he saw into the room beyond, he leaped through the opening with a shout.

Chick, looking exactly like another Nick Carter, was standing with his back against the wall, and he held a pistol in either hand with which he was covering half a dozen men who were holding up their hands, over against the bar; and beside Chick were two sailor-boys and the

East Side tough in whom the detective recognized Patsy, Ten-Ichi, and Danny. On the floor between the two opposing factions, stunned, but otherwise unhurt, was Ralph Bolton.

"Here I am, my lads!" he called out, as he entered the room. "I guess it wouldn't have been long before you'd have had me out of this, at any rate. But we needn't wait now."

He crossed through the room to the street door of the saloon and opened it. Then he turned to the men in the barroom.

"Get out of here, all of you!" he ordered, "and thank your stars that I don't take you all in. Danny, run and find a policeman and bring him here. Patsy, clap irons on that fellow on the floor."

"We've got him for murder this time, Nick," said Chick. "He killed Black Bill Hurly early this morning."

"All the better for both of them. Now, Patsy, if you know what has been happening since I was knocked down and out last night, let me hear it."

"Chick knows it better than I do, now," replied Patsy.

"All right; then while he is telling me about it, you and Ten-Ichi mount guard over that door. Don't let anybody inside until the officer comes. Now, Chick!"

And as rapidly as possible Chick related everything that had happened, all of which is already known to the reader; and when he had finished Nick glanced at the clock over the bar.

"Half-past one," he said. "We have ample time. That is good news about Sheeny Mike being on that train. He is an old offender and a slick article. I was afraid we might lose him; but now I see we will get him there, at the train. You have done well, lads, all of you. It doesn't seem as if an hour and a half had passed since Ralph Bolton was in the room up-stairs with me. What started the row here, Chick?"

"Bolton came into the saloon through the front door, and saw me. At first I suppose he thought you had escaped, for he made straight at me. Then he saw the difference, and he called out to the others who were here to help him. Then he pulled a gun and let drive at me, but the bullet went into the ceiling somewhere, for Danny picked up one of those stone match-safes and threw it at him. It hit him on the temple, and he went down. Then you came into the room."

Danny returned just then with a policeman, and the prisoner was turned over to him to take to the station. Patsy and Ten-Ichi being sent along as body-guard, and to make the necessary charge against him—and Nick Carter, with Chick, took their way homeward.

Having arrived there, Nick found that if he hurried he could catch a train which would take him to Poughkeepsie in time so that he could intercept the train upon which Loris Dent and the two plotters against her life and inheritance, would be passengers; and so, with careful instructions to Chick to be at the train with the other assistants, and also to have Henry Horton there, Nick hastened to the Grand Central Station.

When, some hours later, he boarded the train he sought, at Poughkeepsie, he had adopted a simple disguise so that Hermia would not recognize him the moment she saw him; and in this way he started through the train from the front.

It was not until he reached the very last car that he discovered the people he sought; but there was no difficulty at all in recognizing any of them.

Hermia was seated alone, in one of the sections of the car; across the aisle from her, side by side, was the handsome crook who was known as Sheeny Mike, and beside him, talking to him with the greatest show of confidence, was a charming girl.

Even as Nick passed them, moving toward the rear of the car, he discovered what game it was that Sheeny Mike was playing, for he heard the young woman say to him:

"I cannot forget how thoughtful and kind of you it was to come all the way to Albany to meet me. It makes it seem so much easier and better. And I had such a different idea of you, Mr. Horton——"

"Gee!" murmured the detective, to himself. "He is passing himself off as Horton." The girl continued:

"Such a different idea of you. I supposed you were a much older man, you know. My father used to speak of you so often. I hope I may be very happy in my New York home, and I think I will; but it will all be so different, don't you know."

The crook murmured something back at her which Nick could not hear; and then she said:

"Yes. I have had rather a pleasant trip. It is all very interesting, crossing the continent. I used to want my father to bring me East, but he was always too busy to get away."

"I see how it will be," mused the detective. "Mike will manage to pass the baggage-checks to Hermia, and when

the train runs in at the station, Hermia will be among the first to descend. Mike will hold back a little with the real Loris, and she will not object, believing him to be her guardian. Then he will lead her away behind the crowd, thrust her into a hired hack, and drive her to some agreed-upon place—probably to that horrible house where they had me tricked up so thoroughly. What a fate for a sweet young girl like that! Thank Heaven we are on hand to block their game.

"When Hermia walks off the train with those checks in her hands, she must run right into Chick, who will be awaiting her; and Chick, thank goodness, knows her by sight. It will be my lookout to nail Sheeny Mike."

Hermia sat very silently in her section of the train.

She never raised her eyes at all, nor did she once appear to notice anything that was going on around her—that is, not until the train rushed out of the tunnel and rolled on toward the station.

Then she rose hastily from her seat, pulled a white, spotted veil down over her face, and, with a grip in her gloved hand, made her way to the forward end of the car.

As Nick had anticipated, Mike and his companion remained seated where they were; and Nick heard him say:

"There is no use being in haste. There is a lot of time."

The moment the train came to a stop, Hermia left it; and Nick let her go, for he knew that she would walk right into the trap that had been set for her. The detective's whole attention was to be devoted to the other two.

As he had surmised would be the case, Mike did not attempt to leave the car until all the other passengers were out of it; but then he rose, and with Chesterfieldian politeness, he began gathering Loris Dent's things together—and then, as they stepped from the car at the front platform, Nick got down at the rear.

He saw that they strolled slowly enough along the narrow way toward the front of the station, and at last when they passed through the gate they turned through the concourse toward Vanderbilt Avenue.

Nick followed them, and was quite near when Sheeny Mike called a closed hack and bade his companion enter it.

In the meantime Nick had passed around to the opposite side of the hack, and just at the proper moment, he swung himself upon the high seat beside the driver, knowing that Sheeny Mike could not see him.

When the astonished driver would have expostulated with the detective, Nick said to him rapidly.

"Say nothing. I am an officer. That man is a crook whom I want. Drive as fast as your horses can go to the East Fifty-first Street police station. Don't stop for anything. Go to Lexington Avenue and then up the avenue to Fifty-first Street. Run your horses, if you have a chance."

And there was a chance, and the driver did put his horses into a run.

When he turned up the avenue, Mike inside the hack vainly sought to attract his attention, but even he did not guess what had really happened until the hack whirled around the corner into Fifty-first Street and drew up at the station.

Then, instantly, Nick Carter leaped down, removing his disguise as he did so; and he threw open the door of the hack before the man inside could do it.

Nick held a revolver in his hand, for he knew his man and how desperate he was when cornered; but he said very coolly:

"Sheeny Mike, I am sorry to interrupt your little journey to Ryerson Street, but there are some people inside the station here, who want to see you. If you make a move to escape, I will shoot you, so you'd better not try it on."

Well, that is the story.

Of course Loris Dent was greatly startled, but explanations were soon made, and it was not long before Nick conveyed her to the home of her guardian, where she was cared for by his sister Ruth.

Hermia had done exactly as Nick supposed she would: she had walked straight into Chick's trap. She had even been allowed to enter Horton's carriage and was driven in that to the station-house of the police.

And so it happened that the three crooks, Bolton, Mike, and Hermia, were arraigned before a magistrate and held for the Grand Jury the following morning.

It should be said that the last information obtainable about Marston, he was in Australia doing well.

THE END.

The next number (552) of the NICK CARTER WEEKLY will contain, besides the departments and sketches, another great story entitled "The Daredevil Crook; or, Nick Carter Finds a Promising Clue."

NEW NICK CARTER WEEKLY

NEW YORK, JULY 20, 1907.

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TALKS WITH OUR READERS.

I have read your clever stories for some years, and I write to know what I should do to become a detective? Is there any school I could attend, or any instructor who would teach me the paces? I have been thinking of this thing for a long time, and really believe I've got the stuff in me to make a good "tracker." Please answer as soon as you please, but if you publish this letter do not give my name, for reasons which you can understand. P. B.

Babylon, Long Island.

We have had many letters of this kind. To all such boys we always say "don't." In the first place, even if you have the various requisites needed in the composition of a good detective, the vocation is not only hazardous but arduous. Even the simple duty of "shadowing," to begin with, may keep you in the rain or cold for hours at a time. The associations are far from agreeable, and the pay is precarious. For better or more often for worse, in some other line of business. If you've chosen one honorable occupation, but invited your friends, whether parents or not, to find reasons, "Jones who saw in the finished article" in it. Don't ever started with the idea of becoming a detective. You will find that most of them at one time or another were police officers. Suppose you try the theatre or vaudeville. It would give you a chance to learn whether your abilities were of a high order or not.

My chum and I have had a discussion about the dog Pedro, used by Nick Carter many times. I say there can be many clever things, and prove one by Professor Archer of the famous collie sheep dogs of Scotland. But he wants to be shown, and it has been up to me. Will you please tell me if Pedro does things that no dog could do? It will be a great favor.

Paterson, N. J. J. H. C.

Why, it would be difficult to tell a story about a dog's intelligence that could not be matched from actual facts. Every day we read strange accounts of a dog's smartness.

Stories of the wonderful instinct displayed by dogs are continually being related. There is one of a dog which unmistakably possessed an ear for music.

This animal belonged to an old organ-grinder who had lost his sight, and used to lead a shorter along the streets. One night, after a hard day's work, the old man and his faithful companion lay down to sleep, with the organ beside them. They slept soundly, and when they woke the organ was nowhere to be found.

They were in despair. Their means of earning a living was gone. But the dog led the old man through the streets where he had been accustomed to play, and persons who had given him alms before continued to befriend him, so that the loss of the organ proved not so bad after all.

Weeks went by. One day the old man heard a hand-organ played a few feet from him. It reminded him of his lost instrument, but he paid no special attention to it. Hand-organs were common in the district and he heard them often. Not so the dog. He showed signs of great excitement, barked violently, and led his master in the direction of the organ.

In spite of the threat of the man who was turning the handle, dragged him away from the organ-which proved to be the stolen instrument—and led his master eagerly up to it with expressions of delight.

This is only one of a thousand incidents that go to prove you are right in your assertion.

I am writing to you for advice, since I don't know of any one so well able to set me straight as Nicholas Carter, or the publishers of the weekly periodical in which his interesting stories appear. It is my desire to become a detective. Solving puzzles has always been a fad with me, and I honestly think I am peculiarly well fitted for such a vocation. But I don't know how to go about it. There are numerous schools for detectives advertising that for a small sum they will teach any one how to become a genuine detective. Are they reliable? Can I take the classes with the aid of those advertising? Or, perhaps, some one by mail or through your weekly. JOHN W. MCCHESNEY.

Buffalo, N. Y.

We would refer you to the answer we gave P. B. in this issue. It will also apply to your case. Probably three-quarters of the letters sent in to the "Nick Carter Weekly" are of this order. Young fellows seem to imagine there is a wonderfully fascinating career in the life of a detective. They do not know the revolting and unpleasant side of the business. We would not advise any one to think of taking it up, unless they knew they had a very strong call in that quarter. There is no royal road. All detectives who have made a name in the profession have come up from the ranks. We do not have the least faith in the advertised detective schools. They are only for your money, and can give you little or nothing in return. If you are so good at studying problems why not study law in some office. That profession offers inducements to one of your caliber.

I had an adventure this last winter on a Florida stream that I thought might be interesting reading, if you could find space for it in one of your numerous periodicals. The little river in its course expands itself into a chain of lakes, wide and winding, but always bordered by forests of dead cypress. Into these lakes huge alligators often come. Protruding from the surface of the water at frequent intervals are cypress "knees"—roots which have pushed upward, but which never send out a green shoot. Many of these knees are underground and under the surface.

One day, instead of coming home I found myself in a dug-out, or small canoe, floating down the broad lakes, as they are called. All at once I struck a hidden cypress root and over the boat went. I can't say I enjoyed swimming, and, not among the deepest as I came up, I made for one of the dead trees, half of which was sticking up out of the water.

Suddenly I saw a sight which made me quicken my movements greatly considerably. Two enormous alligators were lured after me.

I reached the tree first, and sat down at the water-level of it. One had made toward me the least. But the alligators had no intention of letting me off so lightly. One of them promptly started to drag his armored body upon the sloping, half-submerged branches.

"Back you fiend!" I yelled, thinking to scare it, and I burst out viciously at his right eye with the heel of my boot.

Snap! By Jove, he almost had me! The iron jaws grabbed at my foot, and the terrible rows of teeth met an inch from it. I went cold all over, and began to retreat farther up the tree.

Still the alligator followed.

I had no weapon, and felt as bad as can be. Things were growing desperate, when another of the reptiles sidled up to the log and gave the first comer a tremendous blow with his tail which sent him flat on his back in the lake below. He turned quickly over, and with a hideous roar, like that of an angry bull, rushed at the one which had struck him.

Then came the strangest combat I ever saw. The tails were the only weapons used, but they were truly formidable. The tree shook and swayed beneath their furious strokes, and my interest in the fight was considerably subdued by the fear that the tree would be broken loose from its fastenings, and turn over.

The combat continued for more than an hour, raging over every inch of the lake. Then one of the combatants went off, and the other, his rage seemingly unabated, followed in hot pursuit.

I looked round for my dug-out. There it was twenty yards away, but capsized. Ought I to take the risk while chance offered itself? I decided to act rather than wait to be devoured by an alligator. I jumped into the water, made a dash for the canoe, righted it and clambered in.

I found a paddle, and made all possible haste from the dismal, perilous lakes. CHARLIE COBURN.

Pensacola, Florida.

Can you tell me anything about this latest fad in the way of sleeve-links and scarf-pins—it is a strange cross, something like two letters forming a square, and I have been told it is a "good-luck" charm. HIRAM SPEED, JR.

Maine.

We believe you refer to what is called the Swastika cross. It is said to be the oldest symbol in the world. Despite many theories, its origin remains unknown, although it is certain that it dates from the remotest antiquity. It has been found all over the habitable world, in the ruins of ancient Rome, in the excavations of Grecian cities, graven on the rock of the mountains of India, on the vases and pottery of Rhodes, on ancient Buddhist idols, and Chinese porcelain, and is historically attested on coins as early as 815 B. C. It was familiar to the primitive astronomer as a part of the constellation of Ursa Major, and a religious signification has been attached to it by various races, ancient and modern. Found among the relics of all ages and people from time immemorial, the Swastika has been considered as a talisman, a charm to drive away evil and bring good luck, long life, and prosperity to the wearer.

Will you please tell me what breed of dogs can go the fastest? I had understood greyhounds held that proud position, but a friend tells me the Russian wolfhound beats him, and that even the deerhound can do better. I hope to hear from you soon. A READER OF "NICK CARTER."

Danville, Virginia.

You speak only of speed, not endurance.

Some members of the dog tribe are capable of remarkable speed. Thus the wolf can run between fifty and sixty miles in one night, and an arctic fox can do quite as well—if not better.

Eskimo and Siberian dogs can travel forty-five miles on the ice in five hours, and there is one case on record in which a team of Eskimo dogs traveled between six and seven miles in twenty-eight minutes. The speed of shepherds' dogs and those used in hunting ranges from ten to fifteen yards a second. Setters and pointers hunt at the rate of eighteen or nineteen miles an hour, and they can maintain this speed for at least two hours.

Foxhounds are extraordinarily swift, as is proved by the fact that a dog of this breed once beat a thoroughbred horse, covering four miles in six and a half minutes.

Greyhounds are the swiftest dogs, and their speed may be regarded as equal to that of carrier-pigeons. Greyhounds used for coursing are able to cover at full gallop a space between eighteen and twenty-three yards every second

THE EXPRESS ROBBERS.

BY CHESTER F. BAIRD.

All our principal railroads employ a regular detective force; but I doubt if ever a road was blessed with the services of such a master-hand at the business as Mr. Detective Rollins of the —— Railroad, and I doubt if ever a railroad detective has had the strange experience, and has led the exciting life that has fallen to the lot of this same Dick Rollins.

But Dick in his last case was, to use his own expression, "badly sold," and he cannot think of it even now without using strong language at what he is pleased to term his "non-professional stupidity." He tells it about as follows:

"Some months ago word was conveyed to our superintendent that a robbery was contemplated by two desperadoes on the United States mail or the Adams Express car on our road, on one of the night trains east.

"Now, this was no news to the superintendent, for I had for several days been 'shadowing' a brace of suspicious-looking customers, whom I had suspected of having a design on company property, or express goods and moneys.

"One evening one of them boarded the train at M——, and with a merry good-by to his companion, called to him as the train pulled out that he would meet him in New York the second day following. Now, I just made up my mind that this was 'a blind' for the benefit of any one who might have had them under surveillance (for you know thieves are suspecting every one), and was confident that their plot had ripened, and would be put into operation that very night. I was somewhat puzzled, however, at one of them going ahead, but reflected that he could get off at the first stopping-place and return or wait there for the night express, on which I was confident they had designs. With all my shrewdness I had been unable to discover that there were more than two of them interested in the contemplated robbery. Contenting myself with seeing No. 1 off and that No. 2 did not intend any new movement prior to the arrival of the night train, I went up-town to look up my chum, Dan Barnhart, to assist me in the work.

When I returned to the depot the robber was unconcernedly pacing the platform with a small valise in his hand and apparently awaiting the arrival of the train, as many more were doing. The train came in on time, and Dan and I watched our man aboard, and, as the train pulled out, quietly stationed ourselves, one in each end of the car. Looking around I discovered an acquaintance seated near me, so I changed my seat and entered into conversation with him. He had formerly been a freight-conductor on the road, and was discharged for imbibing too much corn-juice.

"We stopped at Bascom, but No. 2 didn't move, and there was no sign of No. 1. As we approached Belleville, however, No. 2 became uneasy, and as the train pulled up to the station, arose, and leaving the car, got out on the side opposite the platform. Barnhart's instructions were to watch for No. 1, who, I thought, would board the train at some station, while I kept No. 2 in sight. That's just where I missed it. Dan didn't know the ex-conductor that I had been talking with. If he had known him—or if I had stayed in the car and sent him after No. 2, things wouldn't have turned out

as they did. For although my ideas and suspicions may go astray for a time, they are soon called back again to fasten with unerring instinct on what I may be looking for.

"As No. 2 stepped off one side I alighted on the platform on the other, and strolled slowly toward the engine; and as I passed the forward end of the express-car I caught a glimpse of him, apparently trying to hide from observation. I wondered what his game was. I knew two men couldn't cut the express-car loose from the train, and run off with it and the engine after overpowering the engineer, as has been done in several instances. So I determined to watch, and if he got on the platform of the express, or baggage-car, I would get on the engine, from where I could go out over the top of the cars, if necessary; besides having the opportunity of being first off at all stations.

"But, just before the train started, he passed between the cars, down the platform, and again boarded the train. I must say I was nonplused as to what the deuce he was up to. Of course, I went back to the train, too. On entering the car, I saw him occupying his old seat, and looking as unconcerned as you please. I saw nothing of my friend the ex-conductor, and while glancing around the car in quest of his face, a suspicion of something wrong in connection with him went over me like a flash.

"He had told me that he was going to Pittsburg; that he had the promise of a train on the Chicago & Pacific, and that he didn't want many to know of it, for fear the cause of his leaving our road would become known there, and throw him out of work again.

"Now that I was on a new track, I plainly saw several hitches in his story, and the more I thought of it, the more I was convinced I ought to keep an eye on him, too.

"I started through the train to look for him. He wasn't in the baggage-car, nor in the next two coaches. As I passed into the 'sleeper' I met the conductor of the train, and, pulling him in, asked him if he knew anything about Bates. No. He hadn't seen him since leaving Belleville.

"'And,' said the conductor, 'it is strange, too, for he had a pass over our road, and he said he was going to Pittsburgh or Cleveland to try and get work.'

"Here was another contradiction! Why the deuce hadn't I noticed him more particularly when talking to him! I might have known he was on some 'lay.'

"Our next stopping-place was thirty miles from Belleville, and, determining to use the telegraph at that station, I composed myself for 'a good think' over what I expected would be the next move.

"We had traveled about two-thirds of the thirty miles, I should think, and were passing through a thick, dark woods, when the engine called a stop. The feeling came over me that I was beat; and I told Dan to take No. 2 into custody as soon as we stopped, which we soon did, and I went forward with the conductor, and saw I had been beat to a dead certainty.

"We found the express messenger standing in the side door of his car, pale and bloody; and at his feet lay doubled up the body of a man. I knew that instant it was my ex-freight conductor, and was not surprised to see his ghastly face when I turned the body over.

"He, too, had got out at Belleville, and managed to get on the end of the express-car without being seen. He waited until the train was under headway, and then cut out a panel of the door and crawled through; the roar of the train drowned what noise he made. The messenger was sitting in his chair with his back to the robber, when a slight, but unusual noise near him, with a feeling as of impending danger, caused him to turn his head, to find a masked man standing near him, with a revolver aimed at his head.

"He was on his feet in an instant; when the robber fired, the ball striking him on the shoulder. He sprang for his own revolver, which was lying on his safe, when again he was hit; this time the ball passing through his left arm. Turning, with his own trusty weapon in his hand, he fired two shots in rapid succession, the second entering the brain of the desperate robber, laying him dead at his feet. He then pulled the bell-cord and stopped the train.

"He was a brave fellow and well deserved the praise he received. He was made a perfect 'lion' of, and his company did 'the fat thing' for him.

"Of course, we had no evidence against No. 2, and No. 1 was never seen again by any of us. They were desperate characters, though, and were warned away from our part of the country. Whether they were in 'cahoots' with the ex-conductor, and it fell to his lot to kill the messenger, throw off the safes to No. 1, and then step off the train with No. 2 as the train slacked up approaching the station, or whether they were on a 'lay' of their own, and the ex-conductor working independently, I never knew.

"One thing I do know, that I was never so 'taken in' in my life before."

A RIDE WITH THIEVES.

BY H. HELMHOLD.

Well, I doan't wait no longer, nohow. All ready inside! Git up thar! glang!"

After delivering himself of these expressions, Tom Barter waved his long lash around his head with a crack, gathered up the reins in his right hand, and the old coach rattled over the bridge at a spanking pace, and in three minutes more the city lights were lost in the mist and drizzling rain.

Barter, the coach-driver, had waited patiently for more passengers, but as no more came, at eight o'clock in the evening, he had set off, being due at Hyacinthe by one the next morning.

I was the sole occupant of the coach, and nothing but engagements at the town would have induced me to go on that night. But I am an actor, and actors are not always able to act as their inclinations would lead them.

I had heard the man who delivered the mail into Tom's hands caution him to be careful, as there were a good many money letters in the bag, and altogether quite a valuable load. Naturally my mind wandered on mail-robberies, murders, and other equally cheering topics, and I dropped asleep with a mixture of rain, mail-robbers, and the death-scene which I was to enact at Hyacinthe the following night.

I must have slept very long, for when I opened my eyes, we were rattling through a hamlet, and I heard a church clock toll twelve.

The drizzling rain kept on, and we rattled ahead.

Then Tom stooped over from his seat above, and said:

"You'd better go to sleep."

"I've slept," I replied.

"Well, you see, we can't get into Hyacinthe before three o'clock, we started so late," and he drew himself back.

I heard the crack of his whip, a jar of the coach, remember seeing the moon trying to come out from behind some clouds, thought she winked at me, winked back, and——

When I awoke again, I heard footsteps on the top of the vehicle, then a shout from Barter.

There was no doubt that something was wrong above, the cries, curses, and shouts, and a sliding of feet on the slippery roof telling that a struggle was going on. I pushed open the door, grasped a step leading to the roof, and sprang on to it so that my head appeared above the top of the coach.

The moon at this moment broke through the clouds, and I saw the whole scene.

Three heavily built, strong men had seized hold of the driver.

With a powerful effort, however, he was once more free, and the next moment his arm shot out, and one of his assailants staggered under a fearful blow, reeled, and gave a despairing cry, and rolled off the coach into the road below.

Barter had lost the hold on the reins, and the four horses were tearing along in a mad, frightened gallop.

I lost no time in getting on the top of the coach, and, grasping one of the men, forced him back toward the edge of the roof.

"Over with him!" cried Barter. "They're mail-robbers!"

I made a desperate effort, and put forth all my strength, but just then I felt my feet slide over the roof, and I fell backward. Like a flash my opponent sprang forward, and forced me to the edge. I could not cry out, but I struggled despairingly.

A cry of "help" at this critical juncture came from the other robber, whom Barter was forcing backward slowly and steadily toward the end of the roof, and it fortunately made my opponent drop me. I saw his hand fly to his breast, then heard a click, sharp and thrilling, a flash, and a report.

The coach-driver stood firmly a moment, and then, reeling backward, rolled down under the wheel.

Then a horrible, crunching sound followed, and a heavy jar, as the rumbling coach went over his body. It was sickening, and nearly took away what little self-possession I had left.

The next instant both men grasped me, and hurled me forward, landing me on the rear off horse. In wild desperation and despair, I clung on, and the four horses rattled along at breakneck pace through the darkness, past the villages, past the fields, and through the drizzling rain!

We were now approaching a line of tall rocks and ledges, still the wild runaways kept on in the midst of the storm and darkness.

I turned around, just as a flash of lightning revealed the two men on the coach, one of whom was aiming a pistol at me.

A flash, a report echoing and reverberating among the hills, a shriek ringing out in fearful sharpness, such as only a suffering horse can give, and the animal in front of me dropped.

On went the three remaining animals, still faster, carrying on with them, in their mad impetus, the wounded one till he was crushed into a shapeless mass.

We had passed the ledge, when suddenly the horse I bestrode stumbled, his feet having caught in the dragging reins.

I sprang onto the back of his companion, just as he fell under the wheels, and was dragged along by the mangled body of the forward horse. Shriek upon shriek from the suffering animals rent the air, and still on we went.

Another shot rang out on the night air.

I felt a twinge and a burning sensation in my arm, the blood spurted up on my face, and I fell forward, nearly toppling off my horse. I knew I was shot, and was feeling weaker and weaker, the blood flowing in a purple stream from my wound, which I could not bind.

In desperation I wheeled around, and aiming upward into the darkness, pressed the trigger of my revolver, and fired.

"Oh, Heaven! I'm shot!"

He never finished the sentence, for the struggling animals trampled him under foot, and the coach passed over his body, and all was over.

At this moment came a blinding flash of lightning and a terrible clap of thunder. A ball of fire slanted down, and I heard the remaining robber on the roof give a despairing cry, and saw him spring out into the darkness, at the same time that a sheet of fire shot up from the coach.

How I retained consciousness I do not know.

I came to, as it were, to discover that the coach was in flames, the two frightened horses were struggling and screaming terribly, and as the glimmering lights of the town came before me, I felt a terrific shock, a rushing sound in my ears, and then all was darkness.

It seemed but a night—a sleepless, restless night—that I had passed, before I awoke, and found that I was in a hospital, and by my bed two of my theatrical friends, whom I recognized, and from whom I learned the full particulars of the manner in which they found me, and the result of that wild ride.

The last shot which I had fired had been heard, and the blazing coach had been seen at Hyacinthe.

A night-watchman and a station-master had arrived just in time to see the heavy seat of the vehicle detached and crashing down onto me, and had caught me just as I would have fallen under the hoofs of the horses.

I had been conveyed to the hospital, and there had remained delirious for nearly a month, carefully watched over by my professional friends.

The driver—big, strong Tom—was found lying in the road, lifeless.

The mangled body of the man whom I had shot was also found in a pool of blood and water.

His companion, whom Barter had pitched into the road, was also discovered lying in the road, suffering with a broken leg, and the third robber, who had leaped from the coach when it had been struck by lightning, was also badly bruised, but alive.

These two latter were taken into custody, and when I had fully recovered and could give my evidence against them, their trial came off on the charge of attempted robbery and murder, the result of which they were convicted and sentenced to be imprisoned for three years.

Thus ended that terrible ride that surpassed any tragedy of the stage that I ever took part in.

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